

FINAL

**Initiative for Social Action and Renewal (ISAR) Central Asia
Activities Evaluation**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
I. INTRODUCTION	5
II. BACKGROUND	6
A. Socioeconomic and Environmental Situation in Central Asia.....	6
B. The Environmental Movement in Central Asia and the Growth of Environmental NGOs ...	7
C. Donor Support for Development of Environmental NGOs and the Environmental Movement in Central Asia.	10
<i>USAID</i>	10
<i>Other Donors</i>	11
III. THE EVOLUTION OF ISAR PROGRAMS: PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS AND FINDINGS	13
A. Program History	13
B. The Grant-Making Model: Policies, System, and Process	14
C. Findings and Conclusions by Program Component	15
<i>Seeds of Democracy and Expert Exchange Programs (1993 – 1997)</i>	<i>15</i>
➤ <i>Program Summary.</i>	<i>15</i>
➤ <i>Impact on NGO and Civil Society Viability.</i>	<i>17</i>
➤ <i>Impact on Improved NGO Survival Rates and Long-Term Viability.</i>	<i>17</i>
➤ <i>Impact on Environmental Conditions and Environmental Awareness.</i>	<i>17</i>
➤ <i>Lessons Learned.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Caspian Environmental Partnership Initiative [(CEPI) 1998 – 2001].....</i>	<i>19</i>
➤ <i>Program Summary.</i>	<i>19</i>
➤ <i>Impact of CEPI on ISAR’s Offices in Almaty and Atyrau.</i>	<i>20</i>
➤ <i>Impact on Kazakh and Turkmen NGOs.</i>	<i>20</i>
➤ <i>Impact on Sustainability of Partnerships Without Further Donor Aid.</i>	<i>21</i>
➤ <i>Success of Partnerships in Highlighting Environmental Needs and Problems of the Caspian Sea and Bringing More Focused Activism and Attention to Environmental Problems.</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Atyrau NGO Resources Center (1999 – 2002)</i>	<i>21</i>
➤ <i>Program Summary.</i>	<i>21</i>
➤ <i>Description of Services Provided to Assist NGOs in Achieving Sustainability, Improved Networking, Information Gathering, etc.</i>	<i>22</i>
➤ <i>Potential Sustainability of the Resource Center in the Short Term and Steps Necessary to Achieve Sustainability in the Future.</i>	<i>23</i>
➤ <i>Steps Necessary to Achieve NGO Clients’ Sustainability.</i>	<i>23</i>
➤ <i>Environmental Impact.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Remote Grants (“Pereferia”) Program (1999 – 2001)</i>	<i>24</i>
➤ <i>Program Summary.</i>	<i>24</i>
➤ <i>Impact of Program on NGO Sustainability and Success.</i>	<i>25</i>
➤ <i>Percentage of NGO Budgets Covered with Grant Funds and Other Sources of Revenue.....</i>	<i>25</i>

➤ Environmental Impact.....	25
➤ Lessons Learned.....	26
IV. CONCLUSIONS ON ISAR'S OVERALL IMPACT AND PROGRAM	26
A. Program Impact	26
<i>Civil Society Impact (S.O. 2.1).....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Environmental Impact.....</i>	<i>31</i>
B. Program Strategy and Implementation	34
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>36</i>
C. Outreach, Networking, Communications, and Information.....	40
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>40</i>
D. Program Administration.....	41
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>42</i>
E. USAID Management of ISAR Programs.....	42
F. Replicability of ISAR Programs Elements	43
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	44
A. Recommendations to USAID for Activities to Continue Funding.....	44
B. Recommended Approaches to Advancing Environmental NGOs in Central Asia.....	48
<i>Alternative I – Sufficient Funding Scenario.....</i>	<i>48</i>
➤ Recommended elements to be included in design of the program.....	49
➤ Recommended efforts to encourage NGOs to address issues of sustainability	51
<i>Alternative II – Limited Funding Scenario</i>	<i>52</i>
C. USAID Program Management in the Short Term.....	52
D. Recommendations to ISAR for Improvements to Current Programs	53
<i>Program strategy and implementation</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Outreach, Networking, Information and Communications.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Program Administration</i>	<i>57</i>
ANNEXES	
Annex 1	Success stories
Annex 2	Evaluation scope of work and methodology
Annex 3	NGO questionnaire
Annex 4	Interview questions
Annex 5	List of people interviewed
Annex 6	List of documents
Annex 7	Legislation related to environmental protection, civil society, information & NGOs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an evaluation of five consecutive components (programs) of a broader program for environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) conceived and implemented by the *Initiative for Social Action and Renewal* (ISAR) from 1993 to 2001 in the Republics of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Programs in these countries were carried out in accordance with a Cooperative Agreement (CA) signed by ISAR and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in May 1993, and more than 20 subsequent extensions and modifications.

Background. The original program was part of ISAR's Seeds of Democracy program, which ran from May 1993 through 1997. ISAR developed and managed a small grants program, which gave grants to over 300 NGOs for environmental activities. While implementing the Seeds program, ISAR also implemented a cooperative grants program for Central Asian and U.S. environmental NGOs, which supported three cooperative projects of up to \$25,000. Following the Seeds of Democracy program, ISAR implemented an Expert Exchange program, which fostered cooperation among Central Asian NGOs and NGOs from other parts of the former Soviet Union (FSU). The overall purpose of both the Seeds and Expert Exchange programs was to encourage, and improve the capacity of, citizens to undertake actions that would directly or indirectly result in environmental improvements.

After the end of the Seeds of Democracy and Expert Exchange programs, USAID/Central Asia Republics (CAR) developed three successor programs, all also carried out by ISAR. At present, ISAR's program in Central Asia has three major components:

- 1) The Caspian Environmental Partnership Initiative (CEPI), which focuses on building sustainable partnerships between environmental NGOs in the Caspian region;
- 2) The Atyrau program, which includes establishment and maintenance of an NGO Resource Center in Atyrau, Kazakhstan, to develop and strengthen the NGO community in this area; and
- 3) The Remote Grants Program (Peripheria Program), which focuses on assisting regional NGOs in strengthening programmatic capacity by providing small grants.

Evaluation Purpose. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess how the Seeds of Democracy and three subsequent programs fit and contributed to the USAID/CAR's assistance strategy, especially Strategic Objective 2.1 "Increased, better-informed citizens' participation in political and economic decision making" and/or Strategic Objective 3.3 "Reduced environmental risks to public health." This evaluation assesses how successful ISAR programs were in bolstering capabilities of local NGOs to effectively undertake actions that would result in political, economic, and environmental improvements, and whether these models led to the strengthening of democratic processes in Central Asia. The team also sought to document successes and failures, distill lessons, and identify cross-sectoral and thematic synergies that may exist with other USAID- and other donor-supported programs in the region.

Evaluation Findings. USAID's expenditures on ISAR programs in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have been well justified by ISAR's solid implementation of all programs. Overall, ISAR has made a substantial contribution to the development of civil society and in achieving local environmental improvements and citizen awareness of environmental issues. Through the Seeds of Democracy program, ISAR was able to support the creation of a core group of sustainable NGOs in each of the three states where the evaluation was conducted.

- The CEPI program has been successful in connecting Kazakh and Turkmen NGOs with one another and with organizations in Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. These connections themselves have led to a better understanding and greater knowledge base on the part of

individual NGOs and increased momentum among NGOs in the region to work to solve both local and transnational issues.

- The Atyrau Resource Center (ARC) has been a resounding success and is now ready to expand its services geographically and consider growing into an NGO incubator or member-run organization over the upcoming three to four years. Creation of ARC gave a visible boost to development of environmental NGOs and their capabilities in the region and provided access to urgently needed environmental information.
- The Remote Grants Program's impact on regional organizations is similar to the impact the Seeds of Democracy program had on organizations in capital cities.

ISAR successfully supported:

- ⇒ Creation and spreading of environmental NGOs in all CAR, both in capitals and on regional and local levels, and increase in NGO networking;
- ⇒ Development of a number of selected experienced NGOs in each CAR that would become sustainable in the next few years;
- ⇒ Increased outreach of environmental media and information dissemination, environmental education, and public awareness efforts;
- ⇒ Emergence of a reserved government recognition of environmental NGO activities and implementation of selected projects, as well as attraction of financial resources that substitute for state funding; and
- ⇒ Implementation of a number of local environmentally beneficial projects focusing on community cleanup, waste minimization and recycling, tree planting and biodiversity preservation, sustainable new agricultural practices, clean water supply, energy conservation, eco-tourism, and environmental education.

Overall, ISAR's programs have contributed to an increase in the number of registered and nonregistered NGOs, as well as the geographic diversification of the environmental movement comprising a core group of approximately 40 strong NGOs and approximately 200 smaller organizations and initiative groups. ISAR programming has also contributed to:

- Increasing engagement of NGOs in advocacy and environmental decision-making;
- Development of replicable models for supporting the growth of viable NGOs and community organizations; and
- Achievement of visible but modest environmental improvements.

ISAR's Program Strategy and Implementation were effective in achieving stated goals. Similarly, ISAR has satisfactorily fulfilled its objective to create connections among organizations and to maintain program and financial records adequately. ISAR has been adept at navigating the difficult political and regulatory landscapes and cultures in which it operates. ISAR's library and resources are truly accessible to the public, and experts look to ISAR's publications for professional quality content. ISAR's approach of providing extremely small amounts of money, not funding salaries, and treating NGOs like partners has led to a higher survival rate among funded groups than among those funded by other similar grant-

makers. Moreover, ISAR's strategic planning, program development, and grant-making processes embody the democratic values that USAID programs seek to instill in the countries of Central Asia.

Recommendations. In order to achieve the full potential of ISAR's already strong program, it needs to:

- ❖ Tighten connections between its mission, strategy, and results in its program planning and implementation processes;
- ❖ Reduce the influence of environmental movements' elites;
- ❖ Build an appropriate database to track and evaluate its grantees', clients', and its own work;
- ❖ Bring in highly professional environmental expertise in order to better support grantees' work;
- ❖ Drastically expand its efforts to encourage NGO outreach;
- ❖ Improve its monitoring and evaluation program;
- ❖ Ensure follow-up and replication of successful grants where possible;
- ❖ Seek out partnerships and greater coordination with other USAID implementers; and
- ❖ Reconsider Resident Director salaries in order to attract and retain quality expatriate staff.

USAID should continue to fund growth of the environmental movement through capacity building and grants to environmental NGOs; expand support for democratic environmentally and socially sustainable development in all three target countries; and manage primary support to environmental organizations out of the USAID/CAR Office of Democratic Transitions.

As a recognized and credible partner, ISAR should continue to receive support to strengthen environmental NGOs and develop civil society in CAR. ISAR is uniquely qualified and placed among USAID implementing partners to contribute successfully to USAID/CAR's revised Strategic Objective 2.1 because of its long-standing regional commitment, which predates USAID's presence in the FSU; its status as a role model for good governance, democratic decision making, and transparent grant-making process; and its existing network, which can provide environmental expertise, NGO development infrastructure, and informational resources from both the FSU and the United States.

Any new program design should take into account existing and potential synergies with other USAID programs and implementers, including Counterpart International, ABA/CEELI, the International Center for Nonprofit Law, the Soros Foundation, Internews, the Eurasia Foundation, and Winrock International.

Ideally, USAID would offer the opportunity for increased funding to ISAR on a noncompetitive basis in order that ISAR can implement a new program to provide support to environmental NGOs. This program should include a comprehensive training program; access to specialized environmental resources and management consulting; a tailored approach to each country and to organizations at varied levels of organizational development; a pool of matching funds that ISAR can use to build partnerships with other donors with common interests and attract other donors to its programming; focused efforts to encourage NGOs to address issues of financial sustainability; use of existing resources of other USAID implementers rather than expansion of current ISAR infrastructure; a small pool of funds to develop

demonstration projects in support of the Natural Resource Management Program; expansion of funding for the Atyrau Resource Center; and management consulting for the strongest of ISAR's clients.

If less than current funding is available, USAID should, at a minimum, seek ways to continue funding grants and training for ISAR grantees. It is likely that much of the progress made by ISAR in terms of working toward a network of organizations and sustainability of achieved results will be lost without such efforts. However, USAID could continue to run a skeletal program of support by adding funds to Counterpart and ABA/CEELI, while retaining an ISAR-provided environmental consultant to provide advanced training and technical assistance for which Counterpart does not have expertise. In any case, USAID and ISAR must begin to develop an exit strategy, tailored to regional needs.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the evaluation of five consecutive components (programs) of a broader program for environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)¹ managed and implemented by the Initiative for Social Action and Renewal (ISAR) from 1993 to 2001 in selected countries of the Central Asia Region (CAR), namely the Republics of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, under the Cooperative Agreement (CA) with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) No. CCN-0003-A-00-3048, dated May 3, 1993, and more than 20 extensions and modifications, the last dated August 4, 2000, for an increase of total funding to \$10,646,709.²

This Evaluation Report was prepared Ms. Melanie Peyser, team leader and NGO specialist, and Mr. Andrei Barannik, environmental specialist, consultants to DevTech Systems, Inc. under a subcontract to the Checchi/Louis Berger Joint Venture, with all reasonable skills, care, and diligence within the approved Scope of Work (Annex 2), taking into account the available information and the time devoted to it by the agreement with USAID.

The overall purpose of this objective and external evaluation was to assess how successful the ISAR environmental NGOs assistance programs, provided under Cooperative Agreement with USAID, were, and how they fit with and contributed to the USAID/CAR assistance strategy, especially Strategic Objective 2.1 “Increased, better-informed citizens’ participation in political and economic decision-making” and/or Strategic Objective 3.3 “Reduced Environmental Risks to Public Health.” To achieve Strategic Objective 3.3, three strategies were identified: 1) Reform policies, laws, and regulations; 2) develop key government, NGO, and private-sector institutions; and 3) increase access to environmental information and finance.

As the overall goals of ISAR’s programs are to encourage and improve the capacity of environmental NGOs to undertake actions that would directly or indirectly result in environmental improvements and increased public environmental awareness and participation, the two goals of grassroots democracy building and environmental improvements became intertwined in the ISAR programs and thus could not really be separated from each other for the purpose of evaluation. Therefore, this evaluation looked at the extent to which the Seeds of Democracy program and its successor programs led to gains and improvements in the spheres of both democracy and environment. In short, this evaluation assesses how successful ISAR programs were in bolstering capabilities of local NGOs to effectively undertake actions that would result in political, economic, and environmental improvements, and whether these models led to strengthening democratic processes in Central Asia. The team also sought to document successes and failures, distill lessons, and identify cross-sectoral and thematic synergies that may exist with other USAID- and donor-supported programs in the region that can foster sustainability of local NGOs.

¹ There is an increasing wealth of literature discussing the civil society and environment nexus, and two of these texts have been reviewed for the purpose of this evaluation: Robert J. Brulle, *Agency, Democracy, and Nature. The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000; Ronnie D. Lipschutz with Judith Mayer, *Global Civil Society & Global Environmental Governance. The Politics of Nature from Place to Planet*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1996.

² Note: A major portion of funding under the Cooperative Agreement went to ISAR’s programs in Russia and Ukraine, and in far lesser amounts to other CAR and FSU countries, including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. A number of modifications were made specifically to sharpen the focus and expand the scope of ISAR’s activities in CAR and to clarify intended impacts and expected outcomes of various grant-financed programs.

The evaluation team has developed recommendations regarding expansion, discontinuation, or addition of programs in order to complement current assistance and ensure the sustainability of the programs' accomplishments.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Socioeconomic and Environmental Situation in Central Asia

Attempts to deal with global and local environmental degradation in Central Asia have spawned a virtual environmental establishment — innumerable international, national, and local government agencies, scientific programs, think tanks, and foundations, and thousands of social-movement organizations. Yet, despite all these well-intentioned and hard-fought efforts, the scope and severity of ecological problems continue to increase.

The Central Asia countries continue to rely on a pre-transition economic infrastructure and outdated technologies, and are forced to cope with sharply reduced or a lack of public funds for environmental investments. Many environmental monitoring programs have been discontinued or employ outdated equipment, further limiting the availability of credible information open to public scrutiny and informed participation in dialogue and decision-making on environmental and development issues. Poor governance and widespread corruption, unclear property rights, weak laws, and arbitrary decision-making are among the problems that discourage the flow of private-sector resources.

The three countries included as part of this evaluation of ISAR's programs — Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan — present a mixed picture of improving and worsening socioeconomic and environmental conditions.³ Some environmental pressures, including air and water pollution, have declined due to a combined impact of significantly reduced economic activity, including industrial and agricultural production, and the consequence of price adjustments in the energy, ferrous and non-ferrous, and chemical subsectors.

Though lower outputs in many industrial subsectors and lack of agro-chemicals have resulted in falling ambient levels of many toxic air and water pollutants, the total pressure of past pollution continues to threaten public health and the sustainability of ecosystems. Reduction in ongoing environmental pollution did not lead to visible improvements in public health, because the economic situation continued to deteriorate in all three states, particularly in rural areas where a significant percentage of the population lives below the poverty line and struggles daily for survival. These conditions, together with various levels of political restrictions, have led to societal apathy toward reforms and limited interest in environmental issues on the part of major population groups.

At the same time, pressures on the environment have increased as a result of rapidly growing automobile use in urban areas and the noticeably increased dependency on natural resources exploitation as a major source of export revenues and government income. The negative impact has been exacerbated by global environmental challenges, such as climate change, and reduced state institutional capabilities to monitor compliance with and enforce environmental legislation and standards.

³ The Scope of Work did not include a requirement for thorough assessment of socioeconomic and environmental conditions in each particular country, which influence available public and private responses. The background information selected for inclusion in this report briefly highlights the setting and constraints most directly related to the USAID program as it relates to ISAR activities in Central Asia (see CDIE definition of background, 1997 Tips, accessed at www.usaid.gov). Please see the list of documents for sources of additional information.

Water pollution, land contamination, and loss of fertility due to unsustainable water management and agricultural practices are acute environmental problems in the watersheds of the Caspian and Aral Seas. Though the above are problems common throughout the Central Asia Region, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have many environmental problems caused and amplified by specific local economic and ecological conditions that require well-defined and targeted interventions. Improved natural resources management and efficient environmental protection, at regional/transboundary, national, and local levels, aimed at ensuring sustainable livelihoods of communities and conserving fragile ecosystems remain a priority. Projects dealing with reliable drinking and irrigation water access and supply, adequate sanitation, and energy efficiency that will lead to improved public health have been identified as requiring urgent actions in many government programs.

Since gaining independence, all of the Central Asia Republics have adopted numerous laws seeking to improve policy and regulatory frameworks for environmental protection and natural resources management. However, implementation of these new regulations has been disappointing. For example, though the countries have adopted water-sharing agreements, their implementation is weak and this poses a constant threat of increasing transboundary conflicts.

The Central Asia Republics, with the assistance of multilateral and bilateral donors, have prepared National Environmental Action Plans and Sustainable Development Strategies that define short-, medium-, and long-term priorities. These plans envision efforts in four basic directions: 1) strengthening environmental management as part of public-sector reform, 2) integrating environmental concerns in sector and macroeconomic strategies and decision-making, 3) removing environment-related impediments and risks to private investment, and 4) encouraging countries in their efforts to build an environmental culture through environmental education, participation, and improved access to environment-related information. The latter will require achieving broad political consensus for environmental priorities at the national and local levels, and participation of communities and nongovernmental organizations in designing and implementing selected activities that have direct impact on their quality of life.

B. The Environmental Movement in Central Asia and the Growth of Environmental NGOs

The Soviet system was based on the Communist Party's monopolization of public realm that prevented the coalescence of independent and unsanctioned public activities; opportunities for environmentalists and opponents of water diversion schemes and nuclear power to speak out and appeal to mass audiences were almost nonexistent.⁴ Only government-sponsored organizations, like environmental protection societies (established in the mid-1920s), associations of fishermen and hunters, or "green squads" at universities, were allowed to exist and represent biodiversity, wildlife protection, and environmental causes.⁵

⁴ See: Н. Ф. Глазовский, *Аральский Кризис. Причины Возникновения и Пути Выхода.*, Москва, Наука, 1990; Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly Jr., *Ecocide in the USSR.*, Basic Books, New York, 1992; Murray Feshbach, *Ecological Disaster. Cleaning Up the Hidden Legacy of the Soviet Regime*, A Twentieth Century Fund Report, The Twentieth Century Fund Press, New York, 1995; Philip R. Prude, *Environmental Management in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1991; Philip R. Pryde, ed., *Environmental Resources and Constraints in the Former Soviet Republics*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1995; also see: Robert J. Kaiser, *Social Mobilization in Soviet Central Asia*, and *Nations and Homelands in Soviet Central Asia* in Robert A. Lewis, ed., *Geographic Perspectives on Soviet Central Asia*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992.

⁵ See: Общественное Экологическое Движение России. Справочное Пособие. Под редакцией А. К. Смирнова, Российское Экологическое Федеральное Информационное Агентство, Министерство Охраны Окружающей Среды и Природных Ресурсов Российской Федерации, Москва, «Экология», 1995, стр.12 – 27. Also see: Nicholas A. Robinson, Sidney & Austin, New York, U.S.A., *Environmental Law of the USSR and its Republics*, Int'l. Env'tl. Law and Reg. Issue (1991).

All of this changed, however, with the introduction of Gorbachev's reform program, openness of information regarding environmental degradation, and the graphic demonstration of the dangers of environmental pollution in over 16 highly critical areas, including the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan, the Tengiz oil field and the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground of the Northern Caspian Sea and eastern Kazakhstan, and the Chernobyl nuclear power station.⁶ From that time on, popular environmental and anti-nuclear movements proliferated rapidly across the former Soviet Union (hereinafter FSU), often promoting national identities and linking with protests against the antidemocratic incursions of an "imperialist center."

Because environmental movements stress the protection of land territory and natural resources, or a group of people that inhabit a particular area, there is a natural affinity between environmental and national goals. This has been particularly true in the case of transboundary environmental pollution, nuclear power and testing, mono-cultural agricultural development, and water mismanagement that were easily portrayed in Central Asia as powerful threats to the survival of an indigenous people or nation. Environmental protest movements emerged around a variety of dangerous industrial facilities, like non-ferrous plants in Ust-Kamenogorsk and Leninsk in Kazakhstan or chemical plants in the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan. Thus, environmental and anti-nuclear movements benefited substantially from the mobilization potential of national identity, and vice versa. Environmental and anti-nuclear movements, carrying strong nationalist overtones, provided powerful springboards for national sovereignty movements.⁷

Environmental social movements may be viewed as forums within which people can explore, contest, and reaffirm identities in the immediate social and natural environments. In joining environmental, water protection, and anti-nuclear movements, such as various Committees to Save the Aral and Caspian Seas and Balkhash Lake and the Nevada-Semipalatinsk Movement, people in Central Asia clearly were concerned with more than just environment or nuclear safety. Environmental movements eventually became a way in which participants came to understand and realize their new, real or perceived, identity in a rapidly changing world.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, political independence was achieved in Central Asia, thus suddenly taking away the powerful mobilization potential that nationalism provided to environmental movements. Some politico-environmental leaders were appointed to important government positions and in this way isolated from the movement, consciously or not. For example, in the early 1990s, Oljas Suleimenov, leader of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement and potential opposition leader in Kazakhstan, was appointed Ambassador to Italy, far away from turbulent Almaty. Protests against local environmental problems could no longer be construed as the complaint of a "colony" against its "imperial master." Thus, the achievement of national sovereignty and emergence of state fragmentation in Central Asia reduced the mobilization role of national identity in expanding environmental and anti-nuclear movements, and people and elites alike were left disoriented. Both political elites and the mass of society found themselves confused about their primary political and religious identification and directions for future evolution. At the same time, rivalry for regional domination and prominence between leaders of

⁶ See, e.g.: Wolfgang Rudig, *Anti-Nuclear Movements: A World Survey of Opposition to Nuclear Power*, Longman Group, Essex, United Kingdom, 1990.

⁷ See: Ю. Ю. Галкин, *Экологическое Движение. Социально-Философский Анализ Проблем и Перспектив Экологического Движения в России.*, Российская Академия Управления, Гуманитарный Центр, Москва, 1993; Л. Н. Панкова, *Идейные Истоки Современных Альтернативных Движений.*, Москва, 1991; О. Н. Яницкий, *Социальные Движения: 100 Интервью с Лидерами.*, Москва, 1991; О.Н. Яницкий, *Российское Экологическое Движение: Лидеры, Факты, Мнения, Международные Отношения*, Москва, 1993; Jane Dawson, *Intellectuals and Anti-Nuclear Protest in the USSR*, in *Beyond Sovietology: Essays in Politics and History*, ed. Susan Solomon, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1993, pp. 94 – 124; Jane Dawson, *Anti-nuclear Activism in the USSR and Its Successor States: A Surrogate for Nationalism?*, *Environmental Politics* 4, No. 3, 1995, pp. 441 – 466; David Marples, *The Social Impact of the Chernobyl Disaster*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1988.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as their different views on the pace of economic and political transformation, are shaping to a great extent the scope of government policies and responses to environmental problems and the evolution of civil society.

Another important constraint is the Communist Party's longstanding monopolization of access to and distribution of resources and the consequential infrastructure legacy, which has dramatically shaped the ability of autonomous actors to mobilize independent movements. Important tangible resources such as funds, meeting space, computers, printing facilities, faxes, and communication, as well as intangible resources such as social networks and organizational and professional skills, are often tightly held or controlled by hidden networks of communist elites, family clans, and friends networks.⁸ Control is maintained over other tangible resources, including property, environmental information, press, and TV, thereby effectively limiting the rights of independent associations. In short, emerging groups or groups perceived to be a threat are likely blocked.

Many NGOs and independent actors have also been and remain severely disadvantaged in access to less-tangible or intangible resources such as social networks, organizational skills, specialist and professional expertise, and legal protection for their activities. This has created conditions for emergence of *movement surrogacy*, like "GONGOs," i.e., NGOs organized by government or politicians that seldom reflect a spontaneous expression of a shared value commitment, with less voluntary participation, but often created solely to capture resources for non-cause purposes. "There seems to be a calculated policy to limit democratization through the creation of a 'constructive' opposition. This takes the form of GONGOs . . . and of 'free'" media that is in fact subordinate to the almost total control of the authorities."⁹

The continuing economic turmoil has made the above organizational limitations a persistent feature of FSU NGOs. With movement of foreign capital into Central Asia since 1991, the most vibrant and effectively organized movements and NGOs are frequently those directly linked to and sponsored by international organizations and donors. Western aid has become a critical factor in determining which independent organizations and NGOs will survive and be able to carry out their agendas. Donors, preoccupied with disbursement of funds, are quite often tempted, instead of critically analyzing strengths and weaknesses of existing social movement and grassroot and community-based organizations, to facilitate the creation of new NGOs, i.e., "DONGOs," suited to their own perceived needs, without taking into account existing socio-political conditions.¹⁰

The differences, strengths, and weaknesses of environmental movements in Central Asia may also be traced to other factors, including the length of time incorporated in the FSU, method of incorporation, republic size, degree of ethnic homogeneity, pre-existing histories of independent statehood, and cultural distinctiveness.¹¹

⁸ Typology into *tangible* and *intangible* mobilization resources was suggested by John Freeman, Resource Mobilization and Strategy, in *The Dynamics of Social Movements*, Mayer Zald and John McCarthy, eds., Winthrop, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979.

⁹ Abdumannob Polat, *The Islamic Revival in Uzbekistan: A Threat to Stability*, in Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower, eds., *Islam and Central Asia. An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?*, Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Washington DC, 2000. The "best example" of a QUANGO (quasi-NGO) is "Ecosun" NGO in Uzbekistan run by Mr. Yusuphjan Shadimetov, former senior government official. "Ecosun" can marshal almost unlimited government resources and support of national and local officials for its program activities.

¹⁰ Environmentalists in the CAR do not clearly distinguish between GONGOs and DONGOs, and prefer to call them "QUANGOs" or quasi-NGOs.

¹¹ E.g., see: M. Holt Ruffin, Alyssa Deutschler, Catrona Logan, Richard Upjohn, *The Post-Soviet Handbook. A Guide to Grassroots Organizations and Internet Resources*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1999.

With shortages often directly affecting people's home and work lives, the symbolism of the environmental and anti-nuclear crusade was largely stripped away. While mass environmental movements have dwindled since the early 1990s, there is no reason to give up hope that an effective environmental movement and NGOs will emerge and pressure new governments to move forward with environmentally and socially sustainable development. Government, NGOs, the press, and donors all agree that independent environmental NGOs make up one of the, if not *the* strongest NGO subsector. Women's NGOs and social service NGOs are sometimes also noted as having strong capacity, recognizable impact, or good visibility in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In Turkmenistan, only quasi-governmental cultural, scientific, and educational organizations are thought to equal the organizational capacity and ability to operate of environmental NGOs. Observers believe that the source of this strength comes from the fact that environmental NGOs were the first to develop because they offered a political alternative to the Communist Party during the late Soviet period. However, actors within the environmental movement note that "ISAR played a key role in the development of the environmental movement in Central Asia and especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan."¹²

In comparison to other groups of NGOs within the Third Sector, environmental NGOs are less adept at building community support, and when they do actually advocate, they often do so without a broad public mandate. Part of the outreach problem stems from the shift in positioning of the sector because of economic downturns. The environment is simply not on the top of citizens' agendas and won't be unless or until they can feed themselves and achieve a decent livelihood. It should also be noted that grassroots environmental organizations around the world are advocates of change and are often more progressive than the communities in which they operate. It is necessary to recognize that not all environmental NGOs are likely to or should reflect the perceived needs and agendas of their local communities. However, even the most radical environmental organizations should attract a core group of citizens who support their goals, develop the skills to garner public support, and work to persuade other citizens to consider the changes they are recommending.

C. Donor Support for Development of Environmental NGOs and the Environmental Movement in Central Asia.

USAID

USAID has and continues to support a number of activities that contribute to the sustainability, professionalism, and engagement of environmental NGOs in Central Asia. In addition to support to ISAR activities, the subject of this evaluation, USAID is implementing and supporting several other programs.

The centerpiece program of USAID's efforts under Strategic Objective 2.1 has been the *Counterpart Consortium*. Since 1994, Counterpart International, Inc. has led a consortium of organizations, including the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), in implementing the NGO Support Initiative for Central Asia. The program's three components are: training; facilitating information exchange among regional NGOs and with the international community; and operating a small grants program for Central Asian NGOs. As part of the initiative, Counterpart supports resource centers in smaller cities in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The most recent addition to Counterpart's program in Central Asia is the Community Outreach Program, which is aimed at consolidating efforts to identify problems and needs of the community and to develop and implement strategies to solve those problems. The program's principal instrument is the methodology of participatory community appraisal and the process of joint planning. At least some of the projects are expected to address similar issues to those

¹² Zueev, Alexander, Ekopolis, Roundtable in Tashkent, June 4, 2001. While this assessment focuses on Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the program has, at various times, served all five Central Asian Republics.

receiving funding by ISAR over the past eight years, including projects aimed at local environmental cleanup, water use and conservation, and re-greening of local land.

The Natural Resources Management Project (NRMP), led by PA Consulting and with the participation of Counterpart International, provides technical assistance, training, and limited equipment and commodity support to assist the Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to improve the management of critical natural resources, primarily water and energy. The focus of the project is on three categories of natural resources in the region — water, energy, and land. As part of efforts to establish public commitment for natural resources management policies, the project envisions public awareness campaigns and increased NGO involvement in influencing the integration of new policies, practices, and procedures to specific, critical environmental issues at the local level. Thus far, component 12 of the project, which addresses public awareness, has not yet been launched fully, and as of late May, the strategy for working with NGOs had not yet been approved. Nonetheless, ISAR and NRMP have successfully collaborated in Atyrau. Most recently, this collaboration produced a seminar on the role of NGOs in environmental decision-making processes.¹³

American Bar Association/Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) is currently implementing an Environmental Public Advocacy Center (EPAC) project. The project provides support to EPACs to help citizens and NGOs enforce their rights through consultations and legal cases. In working to strengthen the foundation for improved environmental management and the rule of law, the EPACs train judges, lawyers, prosecutors, governmental officials, and NGOs on domestic environmental laws and international norms and standards. The EPACs are also expected to be involved in establishing environmental clinical programs at universities in order to introduce the concept of *pro bono* services and skills development training into the law school curriculum.¹⁴ At least one of the planned EPAC partners is an ISAR grantee.

Eurasia Foundation grant-making is carried out by offices in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and Almaty, Kazakhstan. Branch offices in other countries, including Turkmenistan (in Ashgabad), report to the Tashkent office. The Eurasia Foundation promotes the development of effective mechanisms for citizen participation in political and economic decision-making by engaging and strengthening civil society. Currently, the foundation focuses on models to promote financial sustainability of civic organizations through philanthropy, volunteerism, and community mobilization; reduce obstacles such as tax policies, registration procedures, access to information, and protection of civil liberties; and introduce procedures, such as public hearings, that provide citizens with greater opportunities to participate in policy-making processes.

The Eurasia Foundation's civil society program emphasizes projects that advance the financial sustainability of and create a more nurturing legal and regulatory environment for the civil society sector as a whole. Initiatives that promote the development of individual organizations are supported only when the missions of such organizations promote the Foundation's overall goals. Environmental issues and direct support of NGO development currently fall outside of the foundation's mandate.

Other Donors

There are a number of other donors working to promote civil society and/or to preserve the environment in Central Asia. The following information is not an exhaustive list but provides general information about some of the programs with which ISAR and its grantees have had contact or might be able to collaborate in the future.

¹³ See www.nrmp.uz.

¹⁴ See www.abaceeli.org.

The Soros Foundation's Open Society Institutes in Central Asia administer NGO support programs in Kazakhstan. Partially funded by USAID, they seek to facilitate democratic reforms and promote civil society by providing support to nongovernmental and public organizations. In Kazakhstan, the Foundation, with support from USAID, implements the NGO Support through NGO Project (NPO for NPO), which establishes and supports a network of NGO resource centers to provide consulting, technical, and logistic aid to newly established and less-experienced NGOs in their own regions. Two members of the network are former ISAR grantees/partners. In addition, the Foundation in Kazakhstan provides grants and offers a number of educational seminars. The Foundation does not have an environmental program and only a few environmental organizations have received support in recent years, including a one-year grant (now complete) to ISAR's Atyrau Resource Center.

Internews networks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan work in support of regional, nongovernmental television and radio stations. Support includes journalism and management training, legal advice and consultation, marketing consultation, program distribution, technical and computer assistance, as well as the facilitation of two news exchange programs. Internews does not operate in Turkmenistan.

The Public Affairs Section of each U.S. Embassy provides small grants to support democratic reform and civil society. While environment is not currently a priority of these grant programs, a handful of environmental organizations have received funding.

The MacArthur Foundation has provided funding to a few very strong environmental NGOs in the region but does not regularly make grants to NGOs in the region.

Several other *embassies and foreign governments*, including the Canadian and Dutch embassies, have small grant programs that from time to time provide grants to environmental organizations. The Dutch government provides some support to environmental NGOs through the Fund for Sustainable Biodiversity, which is managed by Dutch partner organizations, HIVOS and NOVIB (Oxfam Netherlands). The fund aims to support developments in agriculture, forestry, or fishery that maintain or enlarge biological diversity and are accessible for low-income groups. The worldwide annual budget is approximately 1.8 million Euro. Several interviewees noted grants from the fund.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all Central Asia Republics have independently joined *multilateral financial institutions (MFIs)*, such as the *World Bank Group*, *Asian Development Bank*, *BRD*, and *organizations of the United Nations system (UN)* and *European Union (EU)*. The Central Asia Republics established bilateral diplomatic relations with leading industrialized nations, began independent participation in international environmental, social, and economic agreements, conventions, and alliances, and initiated development of sovereign environmental institutional and legal frameworks based on internationally acceptable policies and requirements.

MFIs' cooperation with Central Asia Republics on environmental and social areas has taken the form of a) free-standing loans directly supporting investments to improve environmental and social conditions, b) environmental and social components within loans aimed at rehabilitation and modernization of various sectors of national economy, including industry, energy, agriculture, water and sanitation, infrastructure, health, etc., and c) technical assistance and small grants programs that facilitate development of new legislation, building managerial and professional capabilities both in public and private sectors, and help to prepare strategies and action plans defining priorities for national environmentally and socially sustainable development.

Several grant mechanisms exist in order to support participation of NGOs in environmental improvement and democratic reform. For example, the World Bank and European Union each have small grant

mechanisms to support civil society projects. However, neither of these funds considers environmental organizations a priority. There are a few environmental NGO recipients in each program each year.

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) with its grant mechanism, has also helped to prepare and is financing a number of projects in each CAR under the Aral and Caspian Seas Regional Programs. Several ISAR grantees were awarded GEF grants before or after their association with ISAR. Additionally, European Union Technical Assistance for Commonwealth of Independent States (EU TACIS) has developed a small grant fund for biodiversity organizations located in specific regions of Kazakhstan. Finally, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) can accept proposals for review by its members. This is not a formalized grant program, and projects only receive funding if a donor country takes an interest. On rare occasions, OSCE offices will also provide micro-grants for NGO seminars or training programs. In Turkmenistan, OSCE maintains a dialogue with the most prominent environmental NGO leaders, including ISAR's original grantees in the region. UNDP, with funding from multiple donor agencies, supports a capacity-building program for the Aral Sea.

Most MFI policies require national governments to ensure transparent and substantive public participation in design and planning of proposed operations and activities that may have adverse impacts on communities' livelihoods and environment. Unfortunately, compliance with the above requirements has been poor, and only very recently MFIs began serious dialogue with local NGOs and engagement of local communities in discussions on the scope of activities that may have a direct impact on their livelihoods and environment.¹⁵

III. THE EVOLUTION OF ISAR PROGRAMS: PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS AND FINDINGS

A. Program History

Eight years ago, ISAR submitted to USAID an unsolicited proposal that aimed at supporting the U.S. Government's strategy for environmental assistance to the New Independent States (NIS). ISAR proposed to promote environmental public awareness and accountability, assist indigenous NGOs, and strengthen democratic process throughout the NIS, including Central Asia, by providing small grants and targeted training/technical assistance.¹⁶ Subsequently, ISAR submitted additional program proposals that were incorporated into and implemented under the existing Cooperative Agreement (CA). Individual CA components/programs included:

- Seeds of Democracy Program and Expert Exchange Program (1993 – 1997),
- Caspian Environmental Partnership Initiative [CEPI, (1998 – 2001)],
- Remote ("Pereferia") Grants Program (1999 – 2001), and
- Atyrau NGO Resource Center (1999 – 2002).

¹⁵ E.g., on October 15–20, 2000, Mr. Johannes Linn, the World Bank's Vice President for Europe and Central Asia Region, visited Kazakhstan and held meetings with governmental representatives to discuss how better to integrate economic and environmental decision-making, and thereby contribute to sustainable development. Mr. Linn also met for the first time (eight years since Kazakhstan joined the World Bank in 1992) with selected representative of local environmental NGOs to improve dialogue among civil society, government, and donors, improve public engagement in implementing development agendas, and help strengthen the regional network of environmental NGOs. (One should note that the Bank's Operational Directive 14.70: Involving Nongovernmental Organizations in Bank-Supported Activities was adopted back in August 1989 and has been mandatory for implementation since then. Only under pressure from its major stakeholders, particularly the United States, has the Bank slowly started improving its dialogue with civil societies in its member-countries.) See: *Partnership with Kazakhstan*, World Bank Office in Kazakhstan, Issue 2, No. 3, November 2000, and briefs prepared by Ms. Oksana Tarnetskaya, Director, Ecological Press Center, Almaty (these can be requested at: ot@lorton.com).

¹⁶ Note: This initial proposal predated reengineering of USAID and development of current strategic objectives, the accomplishment of which are at least partially evaluated as part of this assessment.

The five programs/components were developed in a participatory fashion by ISAR, with advice and guidance from USAID/CAR, in response to USAID's evolving strategy in the FSU and Central Asia. The programs were designed and/or adjusted to contribute to USAID/CAR assistance strategy, especially Strategic Objective 2.1 "Increased, better-informed citizens' participation in political and economic decision making" and Strategic Objectives 3.3 "Reduced environmental risks to public health."

The CA specifically called for ISAR to develop and manage targeted a) technical assistance and b) small-grants programs for capacity-building initiatives and environmental project activities to be undertaken by indigenous NGOs, some of them through regional cooperation and some in partnership with U.S. NGOs. Grant-making was intended to put money on the ground in the hands of civic groups to build infrastructure and communication networks, develop citizen monitoring and environmental education programs, protect endangered species of plants and animals, and publicize the effects of pollution on health. Technical assistance was aimed at training local environmentalists in organization, management, and communication, including e-mail and Internet, proposal writing, public participation, and information outreach.

As required by USAID Environmental Procedures, codified in 22 C.F.R. § 216, an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) was prepared for the Environmental Policy and Technology Project (EPTP, 180-0003). The IEE for the EPTP, under which ISAR programs were initially housed, stated that actions under ISAR *grant-financed activities* would not have effects on the natural or physical environment, and a negative determination with conditions was granted in accordance with 22 C.F.R § 216(c)(i).¹⁷

B. The Grant-Making Model: Policies, System, and Process

The ISAR model, replicating the German Marshall Fund's Environmental Partnership for Eastern Europe, is simple: a) provide grants to finance projects that are prepared and implemented by indigenous NGOs, to benefit the environment and local communities or support democratic institutional development; and b) provide training and information to these local grantees to help them realize concrete projects in a way that encourages citizen activism and public awareness of the region's environmental problems.¹⁸

Through the course of years and under all five consecutive programs, ISAR deliberately kept the size of grants small. The grant options included:

- a) "Discretionary" money up to \$500 to individuals and NGOs authorized by ISAR country staff;
- b) "Seed money" ranging from \$500 to \$25,000; and
- c) "Cooperative grants" with various ceilings depending on the program, but not in excess of \$25,000.

Requests for seed money and cooperative grants had elaborate application, selection, eligibility, and review criteria, which evolved and were fine-tuned over the years in order to reflect the increased capabilities and experience of selected NGOs as well as to accommodate emerging, inexperienced NGOs and changing external and internal development circumstances. Over the years, ISAR introduced some other limitations aimed at spreading grant program outreach beyond the capital regions, maximizing the number of participating NGOs, encouraging cooperation among NGOs, and fostering their search for complementary and/or alternative sources of funding.

¹⁷ E-mail communication from Ms. Alexandra Ewing, Project Officer, Caspian/CAR/Caucasus, dated May 3, 2001.

¹⁸ See ISAR's Website at http://www.isar.org/isar/Central_Asia.html.

First-time applicants were advised by ISAR staff on a one-on-one basis and were trained in project proposal writing, applications procedures and forms, reporting requirements, and review and selection processes. This required a lot of in-country travel, and was a labor-intensive and time-consuming mentoring exercise, which reflected ISAR's commitment to ensuring maximum effectiveness of its assistance. All applications for seed and cooperative grants were reviewed by the Advisory Board in batches (rounds) several times a year, depending on the number of applications and money available. Prior to forwarding applications to the Advisory Board for decision-making, ISAR country staff screened completed application packages to ensure their consistency with procedural and quality requirements, and requested rewriting of proposals when necessary.

The Advisory Board(s) consisted of representatives from ISAR and one to two representatives from each Central Asian country. Advisory Board members generally rotated (with some exceptions) on a rather regular basis. ISAR gradually introduced sophisticated Board procedures that were meant to increase transparency and efficiency of operations and reduce the potential for conflicts of interest. The amount of time an Advisory Board member could serve was also limited to ensure that leaders of multiple NGOs received "on-the-job" training.

ISAR distributed seed and cooperative grant monies in two installments — the second payment was made only after satisfactory evidence of appropriate use of funds and progress toward achieving project objectives. Applications for additional projects were accepted only after all reporting requirements and the project were satisfactorily completed. Technically, no single NGO could receive more than three rounds of seed grants. Discretionary grants were approved and distributed more quickly in accordance with much simpler review procedures that were completed by staff.

ISAR regional and headquarters staff continuously monitored and supervised the grant-making process and project implementation to ensure a high level of NGO accountability, provide quality control, and enforce procedures laid out in grant agreements. Further, ISAR continuously solicited feedback from Advisory Board members, grantees, applicants, and observers to ensure that the program would meet the perceived needs of the environment movement in Central Asia. This feedback contributed to ongoing adjustments and improvements made in program design and implementation over the eight-year period of funding.

C. Findings and Conclusions by Program Component

This section provides brief program summaries for each of the programs included as part of this evaluation. Specific and discreet objectives were defined by the Scope of Work for this evaluation. Each is discussed in this section. Where specifically stated as an objective, a brief statement of the environmental impact follows. Where applicable, lessons learned are summarized at the end of each program section. For general findings and conclusions applicable to all of ISAR's programs in Central Asia, please see Section IV, Conclusions on ISAR's Overall Impact and Program.

Seeds of Democracy and Expert Exchange Programs (1993 – 1997)

Program Summary.

ISAR's proposal, entitled "Sowing Seeds of Democracy: A Project for Environmental Grant-Making in the NIS"¹⁹ and dated December 1992, formed the basis for the above program incorporated into the CA

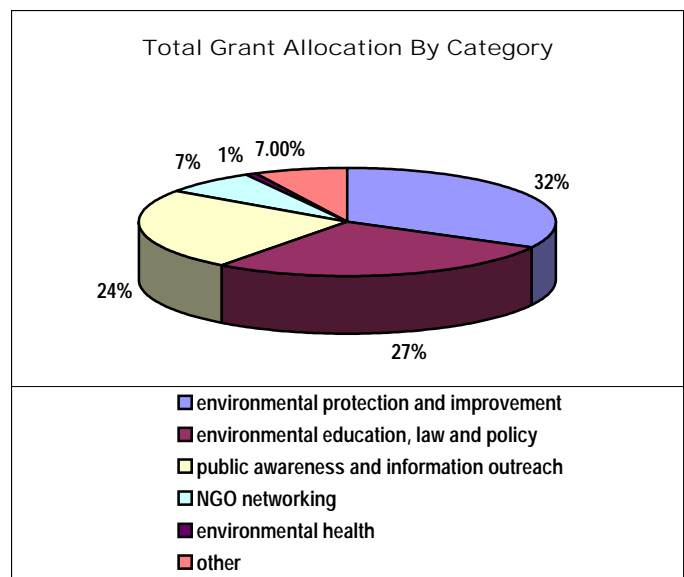
¹⁹ The Seeds of Democracy program was modeled on the German Marshall Fund's Environmental Partnership for Central Europe, which is funded by a number of Western philanthropies, including the Rockefeller Foundation and the C.S. Mott

with the USAID. The principal objective of the program was to support environmental NGOs in participating in and strengthening both environmental public awareness and the democratic process throughout the NIS region, with primary geographic focus *inter alia* on Kazakhstan and secondary efforts in other new states.

The goals of the program were fourfold, including to: 1) strengthen the democratic process by providing institutional and financial support to environmental NGOs, 2) develop a reliable in-country mechanism to build local organizational and administrative capacity, and channel funds to indigenous NGOs, 3) foster cooperation among U.S. groups involved in assistance to green NGOs in the former Soviet Union, and 4) expand the program as necessary and feasible in order to better serve groups in Central Asia.

ISAR expected the program to encourage the growth of the NGO sector and deepen the process of democratic reforms in the NIS with the following results: a) an expanding network of strong environmental NGOs to buttress democratization in the emerging nations of the NIS, b) creation of a hitherto nonexistent model of support for nonprofit environmental activity in the region, c) ensuring broader distribution of available monies, d) creation of a public-private partnership, and e) a growing cadre of environmentalists with managerial skills who can analyze and articulate the needs of their organizations, etc. In addition, USAID expected the accelerated integration of Central Asian environmental NGOs into the international environmental community and improvements in the Central Asia environmental situation as NGOs are better able to utilize the vast world of resources available to them.

To implement the program, ISAR provided: a) grants for training, specialist exchange, and professional travel, b) capacity-building grants, including for basic computer and communications equipment to allow more efficient information gathering and broader dissemination, and c) project-oriented grants to support small local activities to draw in community volunteers and serve as models to other groups. USAID agreed that ISAR grants would range: a) from \$500 to \$2,000 for groups approaching ISAR for the first time, b) from \$2,000 to \$5,000 for groups that successfully completed the first project, and for “joint projects” that bring together two or more groups from different cities in CAR, and c) up to \$10,000 for the most experienced NGOs with proven ability to conduct long-term, more complex projects, or that would serve as resource centers for other groups in their regions.



Foundation. The intent of ISAR's model was to allow USAID to build infrastructure, foster cooperation, and enhance the effectiveness of the New Independent States' environmental movement, the largest, most broadly based citizen's movement in the FSU. The Partnership had several components: 1) through in-country representatives, it ran a competitive grants program for environmental groups; 2) it created a program in “organizational development” and “leadership” training for staff of Central European NGOs, where NGOs' staff were brought to training in the United States, placed for a few weeks with U.S. organizations whose interests paralleled those of NGOs from Central Europe; staff were expected to carry what they had learned back to their home countries; and 3) it sent U.S. experts to Central Europe to “transfer” professional, technological, and organizational knowledge.

All grants were intended to be tied to concrete activities that aimed to produce measurable impacts. In addition, USAID instructed ISAR to monitor the number and sustainability of NGOs in the region in terms of years of operation and the amounts and types of funding, the type of issues NGOs promote, the impact of environmental NGOs, attempts to share lessons learned, etc.

Through Seeds of Democracy small grants programs, ISAR provided support in the course of over five years to more than 360 environmental projects in all five Central Asia states at a total cost of about \$490,000. Almost 50 percent of the total grants were awarded to NGOs from Kazakhstan, where the grassroots movement was developed to a greater extent than in other Central Asia countries. Turkmenistan was distant second, while Uzbekistani NGOs received almost twice less — a rather direct correlation with the strength of the environmental nongovernmental sector in the respective countries. Though a significant portion of the grants went to NGOs from capital areas, in the last few years of the program, grants were increasingly awarded to projects in remote provinces in all three countries.

Impact on NGO and Civil Society Viability.

The primary contribution of the Seeds of Democracy Program to the viability of civil society was to provide culturally sensitive support to activists who were making a difficult transition from the highly politicized role of the only opposition to the Soviet regime to a more sustainable and perhaps less exciting role of working within developing democratic systems to achieve incremental change. ISAR connected Central Asian NGOs with American and international organizations, exposed them to a range of advocacy mechanisms, hooked them up with groups facing similar dilemmas in other newly independent states, provided them with an alternative mission of developing the environmental movement itself, and gave them grants to implement their ideas. Without this support, it is very possible that activists would have succumbed to the new economic challenges of a market economy and would have entered the commercial sector or left their countries as many scientists and activists in other countries in CEE/NIS have. Ultimately, the strongest environmental organizations supported through ISAR have served as models to human rights, women's, social service, minority, and other types of NGOs, and many original ISAR recipients have helped these newer organizations develop and find funding from other sources. For example, the Dozhagus Ecological Club in Dozhagus, Turkmenistan, has provided ongoing technical assistance to the TRIERA, a growing association of hemophiliacs. The organization is now a Counterpart client, but it continues to look to Andrei Zatoka, the Club's founder, as a mentor.²⁰ Most recently, the association sought advice on dealing with harassment by the Internal Affairs Ministry.

Impact on Improved NGO Survival Rates and Long-Term Viability.

For a complete discussion of how ISAR programs have improved the NGO survival rates, please see the second listed Strength under sub-section B. Program Strategy and Implementation under Section IV.

Impact on Environmental Conditions and Environmental Awareness.

As stated elsewhere in this report, the environmental impact and increase in public awareness about environmental issues is less visible than the civil society impact; however, local environmental benefits were achieved. One of the major weaknesses, which ISAR is currently reviewing and attempting to improve in the Remote Grants Program, was the extent to which Seeds of Democracy grantees worked within closed circles and failed to understand the importance of distributing information widely and attracting community support. For example, the Union for the Protection of the Aral Sea in Nukus received a grant from ISAR to open an environmental information center in the city. However, the Union was not pushed to meet standards in terms of number of visitors, information dissemination, attraction of volunteers, or attempts to build relationships with press and government. The Union went on to obtain grants from NOVIP and ISAR to do demonstration projects in wind energy and plastic recycling, but none of these efforts has resulted in replication or community support because of a failure of the center to

²⁰ Director, TRIERA, in an interview in Dozhagus on May 30, 2001.

conduct outreach. A quick review of the center's sign-in book shows that only an average of six to eight people visit the center each month, and, on average, two to three of these visitors are foreigners. While the director, Usup Komalov, is one of the best-known environmental activists in the country, his activities are primarily geared toward participation in international conferences, and he is better known outside of his community than among the local public.

Lessons Learned

- *Travel grants are a cost-effective way to catalyze local citizen action and lasting partnerships.* Most start-up initiative groups receiving funding to attend conferences have returned to develop a local project, expand and improve existing activities, and/or maintain beneficial ongoing communication with other conference attendees. For example, the BARS Center for Community Development in Leninogorsk, Kazakhstan, received a small grant to attend a conference on Ecotourism in Irkutsk, Russia. The center director reports that she built lasting relationships at the conference and learned that “real effect can only be achieved if you work with others and share information.” The center now participates in an international network of organizations working to support ecotourism in the Urals region and Siberia. Thanks to the trip, BARS also learned about the importance of finding revenue opportunities through fee for services and now raises money for operational expenses through provision of consulting services and training program tuition.
- *E-mail connectivity is extremely important to support ongoing organizational development and foster partnerships among NGOs; however, e-mail connections are generally not sustainable because of currently high monthly fees.* In order to build the horizontal networks that might facilitate a national agenda on environmental issues, organizations must be able to be in contact with one another. Regular telephone calls or faxes would be similarly expensive to Internet connectivity. Most groups would not have regular e-mail access without support from ISAR. Therefore, evaluators recommend that substantial attention be given to creative solutions to connectivity issues (see Recommendations).
- *Emergency discretionary grants that provide gap funding to organizations with clear objectives and strong strategic planning skills are worthwhile and can “save” a good organization from losing momentum or failing.* The goodwill generated by such grants benefits ISAR and its grantees down the road. However, emergency discretionary grants should only be provided when it is clear that the organization has developed the strategic planning and financial management skills necessary to achieve sustainability. In other words, emergency discretionary grants should only be given in exceptional cases, and criteria should be developed to measure the extent to which the lack of funding was caused by circumstances outside the control of the applicant or through poor management that cannot be easily corrected. For example, CASDIN in Almaty received an emergency discretionary grant in 1996 to cover publishing of its bulletin for three months because funds from a Dutch donor were delayed. The organization had a clear vision and strategy in place and had proven its ability to attract other donor funding. CASDIN is now one of the strongest indigenous resource centers in the country and provides consulting and training support to several ISAR grantees. CASDIN also conducted training on bulletin design and publishing for clients of the Atyrau NGO Resource Center.

In contrast, “Naurzum,” an organization working to create sustainable agricultural development in rural areas outside of Almaty through reintroduction of “wild” bees, recently received an emergency discretionary grant from ISAR when it had burned through its \$50,000 Global Environmental Facility grant too quickly. While the work that the

organization is doing is important and has generated some success, a site visit and interviews with project partners revealed that the project director has virtually no financial management or strategic planning skills. This makes it extremely difficult for her to put what is best for the project before her humanitarian concerns for the participant farmers. During the site visit, she promised one project participant, a park ranger, that when she received new funding she would try to arrange for electricity lines to be brought to his house, although this would have absolutely no impact on the execution of the project. Evaluators predict that the project will ultimately falter and ISAR's funds will not have served their purpose. In this case, the project would have been better served with training than with an emergency grant.

- *Grants to initiative groups based at government institutions for research or purely scientific work may generate an environmental impact but rarely increase citizen participation in resolution of environmental problems or public awareness of environmental issues.* These grants often simply serve to replace government funding. ISAR is not best placed to fund such activities. When ISAR started making grants to Central Asian environmentalists in 1993, there were fewer than 15 organizations already operating as advocacy organizations in the region. There were few, if any, grant-makers in the region, and the primary drivers of the environmental movement were scientists who had access to information or the knowledge necessary to question government action. For this reason, ISAR needed first to build a core of projects and a network of organizations before beginning to press for broader civil society aims. ISAR has clearly learned that initial grants to scientists who lacked networking and outreach skills were not effective in broadening community support. Their review criteria for the Remote Grants Program reflect efforts by ISAR not to fund research projects unless public awareness can be increased through media attention.²¹
- *Respect and trust for Advisory Board members must be balanced with a healthy skepticism and a demand for full accountability and transparency both in the review process and in grant implementation.* Not all of the difficulties faced by ISAR in Uzbekistan were socio-political. The program ran into trouble because of a lack of transparency on the part of Advisory Board members and a certain amount of blocking by those members of other applicants. ISAR has sought to correct this problem by prohibiting Advisory Board members' organizations from receiving funding under the program for which their staff member is a Board member and stressing transparency and conflict of interest issues in Advisory Board guidelines. However, because ISAR supports non-registered initiative groups, the above prohibition is not always effective, and this policy should be further improved (see Recommendations).

Caspian Environmental Partnership Initiative [(CEPI) 1998 – 2001]

Program Summary.

In 1998, ISAR proposed and USAID approved the expansion of the CA to include the program "Building for Sustainable Future: Cooperation and Partnership Among Environmental NGOs in the Transcaspiian and Transcaucasus Regions." In addition to fostering links and building partnerships among environmental NGOs in the Caspian Sea region, this program aimed at increasing citizen awareness of the environmental impacts of oil development and at providing the venue for NGO activity around other critical environmental issues for the basin.

²¹ Andrei Andreev, Director, Ecopravo, and former member of the Remote Grants Program Advisory Board, in an interview on May 24, 2001.

ISAR proposed to implement this program through three distinct components, and a sequence of inter-related steps:

I – *Environmental Component*, which includes: a) a conference for green NGOs to discuss the most pressing environmental concerns of the region and develop mechanisms for continuous cooperation, b) establishing a regional e-mail network, and provision of technical assistance, financial support, and equipment procurement, c) simultaneous to (b), a small grants round to support 10–15 concrete cooperative environmental projects among NGOs from five countries;

II – *Civil Society Prepares for Oil Boom: NGO Cooperation*, which will increase transparency of and widen information dissemination and citizen participation in the decision-making process;

III – *“Final Component,”* in which NGOs from various countries will work together trying to mitigate the effects of oil development on communities through joint activity and training, and ensuring that communities are aware of and are involved in what is happening in the region with regard to extraction of natural wealth.

In addition to covering all conferences, seminars, and associated staff expenses, CEPI intended to provide for computers and communication networking, office supplies, training, etc. CEPI envisioned two types of grants: 1) up to \$10,000 “cooperative grants” for joint international projects’ implementation by not less than two NGOs from Caspian Sea region countries, and 2) up to \$4,000 to support projects’ implementation by not less than two NGOs from one country.

During the first round of CEPI cooperative grants (i.e., up to \$10,000 with NGOs from various countries), eight projects were selected and awarded a total of \$50,370 (average \$6,297). The largest grant of \$9,714 was awarded to Russian and Kazakh NGOs to implement a project aimed at increasing the safety of operation of an oil terminal on the Black Sea coast pumping Caspian oil as well as public awareness of environmental problems associated with transportation of oil in the Black Sea region.

During the second round of the CEPI cooperative grants, seven projects were selected and awarded \$49,910 (average \$7,130). The largest grant of \$10,000 went to a joint Russian/Kazakhstani NGOs project to investigate the mass death of Caspian seals in spring of 2000, to conduct a public information campaign, and to lobby for administrative prosecution of those found liable for causes of pollution and death of seals.

Impact of CEPI on ISAR’s Offices in Almaty and Atyrau.

The Almaty office expends substantial resources providing informational support for CaspInfo. The Atyrau Resource Center provides little support to the CEPI program aside from contributing information to CaspInfo and participating in CEPI seminars. The staff of the Resource Center does not feel that the CEPI program is at all burdensome and estimate that no more than 5 percent of staff time is spent on CEPI initiatives and programs.

Impact on Kazakh and Turkmen NGOs.

The CEPI program has been successful in connecting Kazakh and Turkmen NGOs with one another and with organizations in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. These connections themselves have led to a better understanding and greater knowledge base on the part of individual NGOs and increased momentum among NGOs in the region to work to solve both local and transnational issues.

CaspInfo has had an enormous impact on NGOs’ ability to obtain professional and scientific information on Caspian Sea issues.

One of the key successes of the CEPI program was the seminar on relations with transnational oil companies (TNCs). NGOs universally report that they now have a better understanding of the environmental, political, and financial challenges faced by TNCs, the ethical issues involved in working with or against TNCs, and approaches both to building relations and to protesting the activities of TNCs in the region. This new knowledge has served to highlight the need for professionalism and quality scientific research and has thereby raised the standard that NGOs in the region are striving to meet in their research and advocacy campaigns. It should be noted that most organizations have not yet met this standard; however, organizations are at least aware of the type and accuracy of information that is necessary in order to make their case.

Impact on Sustainability of Partnerships Without Further Donor Aid.

The relationships built between NGOs through the CEPI program will be lasting. Organizations will exchange information even if funding ends. However, it is less clear that joint activities would necessarily continue as none of the countries involved has an adequately developed philanthropic sector or government interest in Caspian issues to support their own environmental NGOs. Ongoing support for cross-border NGO environmental projects is even less likely. Furthermore, the e-mail connections that ISAR sponsors would probably not be financially possible for organizations in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; therefore, even the exchange of information would become less frequent over time.

Success of Partnerships in Highlighting Environmental Needs and Problems of the Caspian Sea and Bringing More Focused Activism and Attention to Environmental Problems.

Building on experience with Seeds and Pereferia programs, ISAR has developed and is successfully implementing the CEPI program that brings NGOs of the region together in joint efforts to address environmental problems associated with ongoing development of oil and gas resources. NGOs are not only sharing environmental information, but have also elaborated and are implementing projects of common interest. ISAR is helping the organizations develop relationships. The success has been limited due to the difficulty in communicating between partners. These partnerships have the potential to bring new focus and activism. To do so, ISAR should a) help NGOs to digest the wealth of information on environmental problems of the Caspian Sea, and those activities that directly or indirectly cause those problems, and provide unlimited access to the Internet, b) assist NGOs to identify priority environmental problems (on regional, national, and local levels) that require immediate attention and resolution, particularly as they have negative impacts on the well-being, health, and social fabric of local communities; c) bring more professional expertise that will allow NGOs to develop and implement sustainable and replicable projects and activities to resolve identified priority environmental/social problems, not "petty projects" of NGO leaders or redundant scientists; d) ensure timely and transparent environmental, economic, and social information dissemination and analysis that reach out not only to selected NGOs (with a few hundred members in total) but, more importantly, to affected people and communities; e) continue with its help to build bridges and understanding between government, NGOs, and the private sector, f) bring legal expertise (from U.S. NGOs) on how to fight environmental pollution and noncompliance, g) continue with CaspInfo and other bulletins, making them more professional and easy to read, increasing their circulation and translation into local languages, and h) outreach to broader NGO community

Atyrau NGO Resources Center (1999 – 2002)

Program Summary.

Based on its experience with environmental NGOs and regional development, ISAR conducted a needs assessment and proposed modification of the existing CA to include this three-year program to support the development of environmental NGOs in Atyrau, an economically strategic location on the Kazakhstan coast of the Caspian Sea. In Atyrau, as throughout Central Asia, there was no history of citizens'

involvement in the decision-making processes of government and business that impact the livelihood and health of local communities and threaten the environment.

The program is aimed at strengthening the development of NGOs²² that directly and indirectly support environmental causes. To achieve this objective, ISAR intended to: a) create a resources center for local NGOs, where local groups can work with their colleagues, b) provide technical, organizational, and management training for NGOs, c) provide small and cooperative grant funding of a total of \$60,000, with individual grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$5,000, d) publish a regular environmental newsletter for the community, e) support strengthening and building partnerships, and f) provide office, communication, and computer equipment, and cover other local expenses.

According to the Cooperative Agreement, by the end of the three-year program in 2002:

- Environmental NGOs in Atyrau will have developed the necessary technical and organizational skills to function as effective organizations, interact professionally with colleagues and communities, lobby effectively, and plan, implement, and manage result-oriented projects.
- Client NGOs will have realized at least 20 result-oriented and five partnership environmental projects.
- Environmental NGOs have stronger local, regional, and international partnerships.

Additionally, the Resource Center should become a local NGO, functioning as a resource center for technical support and information exchange for the local community, and will have produced and distributed a professional “Environmental Bulletin.” Finally, the Resource Center will have consistently provided NGOs with access to computers, copy and fax machines, telephones, e-mail, and the Internet.

The center has evolved slowly, but the organizations that are developing as a result of the centers' support are creating models of citizen participation, fundraising, work with media, and more recently, in negotiation of environmental issues with transnational oil companies. The organizations being served by the Resource Center are still young and require ongoing training. Many are still in the process of building basic competencies and confidence, but their universal commitment to outreach and achievement of change with or without grant resources is refreshing.

► *Conclusion: ARC has been a resounding success and is now ready to expand its services geographically and consider growing into an NGO incubator or member-run organization over the upcoming three to four years*

Description of Services Provided to Assist NGOs in Achieving Sustainability, Improved Networking, Information Gathering, etc.

The Atyrau NGO Resource Center (ARC) currently serves approximately 30 regular clients and is open to the public during its regular business hours. ARC generally receives approximately 60 visits per month, with 25 to 30 of these visitors being new to the center. In addition to NGOs and initiative groups, students, scientists, journalists, and even local businessmen frequent the center and make use of ARC's library and other resources. Several clients reported that they also call center staff several times per week for consultations on organizational, programmatic, logistical, legal, and environmental issues, and to

²² Prior to ISAR, none of NGOs in Atyrau had an office space and equipment, including computers, faxes, and copying machines; they lacked information on current regional and local environmental issues as well as activities of other NGOs in the region. More importantly, they did not participate in and had no influence on decision-making on local and regional levels.

obtain contacts with similar NGOs, government offices, journalists, and business representatives. Clients report that ARC's grants are not the most important resource but that the technical assistance, space, equipment, and opportunity to network and learn from other young organizations are the big attractions of the center. One client stated, "We don't just come for the money. We came to the center to get start-up assistance. We can find funding ourselves. Here we meet with others with the same problems and gain confidence that obstacles can be overcome. And, most importantly, we have the chance to build joint projects with other organizations."²³ While this organization has received a grant from ISAR, it also raised funds from a local businessman to register.

Potential Sustainability of the Resource Center in the Short Term and Steps Necessary to Achieve Sustainability in the Future.

ARC is currently taking all appropriate steps to increase chances of long-term sustainability. The staff is actively building its own capacity as an organization, relationships with local government, and a solid reputation with TNCs and NGOs in the community. The center has also generated local media attention, and has a number of volunteers who provide services to the center on a regular basis. ARC's clients are not currently in a position to pay for services as most of them are new organizations (less than two years old), and many are not yet registered. However, several client organizations' members already volunteer at the center, and most clients said that they would be willing to barter for services if necessary to keep ARC running.

ARC could probably achieve quick sustainability by appealing to the oil companies, which view ARC as a neutral party that is able to bring NGOs to the table in a more constructive manner than was possible in the past. However, ARC would lose its reputation in the community as an independent organization that provides quality support to NGOs and is first and foremost an environmental organization. Even without the oil companies, ARC might be able to attract in-kind donations from other businesses and could develop fee-for-service options.

Steps Necessary to Achieve NGO Clients' Sustainability.

The NGOs in Atyrau are still nascent and will require ongoing support to build organizational capacity both to implement sound programs and to attract local resources. The organizations are not yet close to achieving sustainability not only because of their own development (which has been surprisingly swift for the region) but also because the legislative and socio-political environment is unlikely to change soon. Organizations have already been adept at attracting media attention to their projects; carried out successful projects; begun to build relations with local government; network and collaborate with one another; raise funds for projects from local businesses; and attracted volunteers. In order to improve chances for sustainability of organizations and their activities, USAID and ISAR will have to take a long-term approach and give priority to immediate needs, including:

- *Low-cost, sustainable solutions for office space, communication, and equipment needs.* Only a couple of ARC's clients have their own computer equipment or space, and they are virtually all dependent on the center for access to the Internet and e-mail. However, organizations are generally working effectively from the center. Because of the willingness of organizations to work cooperatively together and provide volunteer support to the center, it might be worthwhile to look at a long-term, collective solution to organizations' need for space. Depending on availability of funding, ARC might want to expand its services to include those of an NGO incubator that would provide space and equipment to a *limited* number of NGOs. The NGOs themselves would be responsible for maintaining the facility, and would graduate to their own space over time and once they were able to attract adequate support. The Resource Center should continue to operate and work openly with NGOs that are not part of

²³ Director, Anti-SPID (AIDS) Organization, during an interview in Atyrau on June 13, 2001.

the incubator. This approach would allow ISAR to support a small number of NGOs that are most likely to achieve sustainability and constitute a core from which the NGO sector can grow. It would also continue support for new organizations. Other options might include seeking to obtain group rates for Internet access, space for NGOs from local government, used equipment donations from business, etc.

- *Sustainable sources of income.* ISAR should focus on building community philanthropy in the form of a community or other endowed agency. Atyrau is somewhat unique in the makeup of its corporate population and “healthy” economy relative to other localities. A community foundation would serve as a neutral grant-making body that could both receive funds from oil companies and re-grant those funds in its own name. A community foundation could also serve as a hub for citizen participation in NGO activities either through volunteerism or donations. Alongside promotion of the community foundation concept, ISAR would need to intensify work on building a culture of philanthropy and volunteerism in the region.

Environmental Impact.

Creation of the NGO Resource Center in Atyrau gave a visible boost to development of environmental NGOs and their capabilities in the region and provided access to urgently needed environmental information. The Resource Center became a credible partner to NGOs working in other sectors and addressing health, gender, and civil society issues. Continuing training has demonstrated its effectiveness, particularly as new NGOs have better capabilities to translate their ideas into projects that can be implemented and increasingly reflect urgent environmental needs of local communities, and provide them with necessary small grant resources.

Remote Grants (“Pereferia”) Program (1999 – 2001)

Program Summary.

As ISAR-Central Asia’s small grant program ceased to exist in 1997 due to completion of USAID funding and lack of alternative sources of funding, ISAR proposed this two-year program in June 1999. It was intended as a small grant program to support environmental and health projects by NGOs in Central Asia that would also serve as a training ground for proposal writing, financial management, e-mail, and computer literacy outside the CAR capital cities.

Programs goals are to: a) increase the sustainability of NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) in remote areas of the region, b) increase community participation in the environmental movement, and c) strengthen the NGO movement and its legitimacy among the public and government officials in the remote areas of Central Asia. To support these goals, the program seeks to achieve through training and other technical assistance the following objectives: a) to provide NGOs in remote areas with skills to plan, implement, and manage productive, result-oriented environmental and health projects, b) to provide participating NGOs with the technical and organizational skills to function as effective organizations, c) to increase NGO activities in the remote areas, and d) to increase the capacity of NGOs in remote areas to publicize their activities and programs as well as support networking and information exchange.

ISAR developed results-oriented performance indicators to be accomplished by the end of the program. These included:

- Strengthened sustainability of NGOs in remote regions of Central Asia, demonstrated through measurable increases in a) the number NGO members with skills to plan, implement, and manage

small projects; b) NGO clients' organizational skills; and c) levels of NGO membership and community support.

- Strengthened quality of NGOs in remote regions of Central Asia, demonstrated through measurable increases in a) NGO organizational skills; b) community participation in NGO activities; c) media coverage of NGO activities; and d) the number of NGO cooperative projects.
- Improved environmental situation in remote regions of Central Asia, demonstrated by: a) 80 community-based, results-oriented projects realized; b) an increase in community participation in solving local environmental/health problems; and c) an increase in media coverage of environmental/health issues.

ISAR planned to hold a total of six grant rounds. The maximum single grant amount was established at \$3,000. In the first year, ISAR planned to award \$90,000 for about 30 projects, and during the second year about \$150,000 for 50 projects. Proposals from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were also eligible for consideration. Emergency discretionary grants of up to \$500 were also envisioned to support immediate and concrete activities.

Impact of Program on NGO Sustainability and Success.

The Remote Grants Program's impact on regional organizations is similar to the impact the Seeds of Democracy program had on organizations in capital cities. However, it is important to recognize that the organizations being supported with Periferia grants were initially much weaker than their predecessors in the Seeds Program. Therefore, the success rate of these organizations in achieving both impact and sustainability is likely to be significantly lower than results in previous programs. It should be noted that ISAR has chosen not to provide grants to more experienced organizations to support periphery groups under this program, but that there are some original Seeds grantees in the regions that continue to receive support. Organizations' potential for sustainability in the regions where there are other NGO development resources, such as Counterpart resource centers or Soros NPO for NPO centers, are more likely to be sustainable in the long term. Because of limited experience, it is imperative that ISAR create training and technical assistance for these organizations if any level of internal sustainability is to be achieved. Additionally, ISAR must put even more emphasis on outreach, public awareness, local fundraising, and post-project financial planning than it currently does. Training in some of these areas could be provided to grantees by Counterpart (see Recommendations). While ISAR has made efforts to improve its review criteria to focus on these issues since the Seeds program, more steps need to be taken (see Recommendations).

Percentage of NGO Budgets Covered with Grant Funds and Other Sources of Revenue.

Organizations receiving funding under the Remote Grants Program are not asked to provide information regarding their organizations' budgets. Also, ISAR has not developed a policy on measuring budgets or calculating the value of in-kind support and volunteerism. Without this basic information, it is almost impossible to estimate ISAR's contribution and impact on recipients' budgets.

Environmental Impact.

Discretionary and small grants facilitated NGOs networking and built their communication capabilities and, to some extent, professional capacity. NGOs implemented many small-scale successful projects addressing local communities' environmental education needs, improving water supply and waste management, preserving biodiversity, introducing new technologies of sustainable agriculture, and energy conservation. Some of them had sustainable results; others, though meeting project objectives, failed to have lasting impacts due to inadequate project preparation and planning, particularly with follow-up activities.

Lessons Learned

- *Advisory Board members need increased training on issues of confidentiality and the importance of following review procedures.* Review committee members reported that some members chose not to utilize the score sheets that were provided by ISAR and provide point breakdowns in accordance with criteria. These members allegedly gave general scores for projects based on their overall opinions of the proposals.
- *Grants to remote organizations cause increased communication problems, and ISAR needs to develop creative solutions to ensure responsiveness.* Evaluators received several complaints that grant applicants had not received timely decision letters from ISAR. For example, in Turkmenistan, several applicants, whose applications were reviewed at the beginning of May, had not received notification as of May 30th. All claimed to have sent e-mails to the office in Almaty or to have requested information and follow-up by ISAR's representative in Turkmenistan, Timur Berkeliev.

IV. Conclusions on ISAR's Overall Impact and Program

A. Program Impact

This section describes the overall civil society and environmental impact of ISAR programs in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It should be noted that evaluation of the impact of ISAR's programs is colored by several factors. ISAR's fulfillment of the CA and related accomplishments must be analyzed in the context of the social, political, economic, and environmental situations of the countries in which the organization is operating in Central Asia. ISAR and its grantees faced multiple challenges in "realizing result oriented projects" on local, national, and cross-border levels. Obstacles faced in fulfillment of overall program goals are stated at the beginning of the discussion of each strategic objective below.

Though the achievement of the two core goals of the program, environmental improvement and development of civil society, were articulated in the Cooperative Agreement, for the purpose of program implementation, neither USAID nor ISAR clearly articulated the linkages between them. This may have caused ISAR to focus more on the "democracy" side of programs than on substantive aspects of environmental impacts within national or local socioeconomic development. *Oddly enough, the distinction between environmental and civil society results is also not clearly defined.* Therefore, even USAID, in the Scope of Work, noted that "the two goals of the grassroots democracy building and environmental improvements became intertwined in this program and the two cannot really be separated from each other."²⁴ A degree of overlap between environmental and civil society impact criteria is therefore present and some impacts are reviewed from both an environmental and a civil society angle in this section.

ISAR has not maintained a database or gathered information that would allow it to demonstrate and measure impacts, results and progress toward objectives. ISAR grant managers are exceptionally familiar with current grantees. However, ISAR has not, as it committed itself in the CA, conducted ongoing assessment of grantee and client evolution, organizational development, sustainability, outreach, strengths and weaknesses. For the most part, ISAR also did not develop quantitative and qualitative measures for the Seeds of Democracy and Remote Grant Programs. Therefore, evaluators extrapolate from anecdotal

²⁴ Scope of Work, page 1.

and other information gathered through interviews, roundtables, and questionnaires from a sampling of grantees rather than from extensive review of ISAR-gathered data.

Civil Society Impact (S.O. 2.1)

The primary objective of ISAR's programs as articulated in the original CA is "to strengthen the democratic process throughout the NIS region, including in Central Asia" by providing "technical assistance to build linkages between U.S. and NIS environmental NGOs through cooperative efforts to strengthen NIS NGOs. Encouraging local environmental problem solving by NGOs through a small grants program."²⁵ Expected program outputs and results were refined and expanded over time as the Seeds of Democracy Program was provided with additional funding, USAID implemented strategic frameworks in accordance with reengineering, and ISAR requested funds for new programs.

In addition to the impact of individual programs as described above, ISAR's grant and technical assistance programs were expected to "establish strong movements of NGOs concerned with environmental protection and education."²⁶ ISAR's programs were expected to achieve: a) increased coverage of ISAR-funded organizations in local, national, and/or Western television, radio, or press; b) government support for funded organizations as evidenced by financial assistance, in-kind support, and inclusion in policy-making and expertise processes; c) an ability on the part of funded organizations to attract new members and inspire communities to participate in organization activities; d) improved networking by organizations, including the creation of new organizations, mutual assistance, and ongoing collaboration or contact with organizations at the local, national, NIS, and broader international levels; and e) policy changes.²⁷

Finally, ISAR expected to increase the number and expand the geographical representation of environmental NGOs in the region, improve NGO sustainability, and increase citizen participation and ownership of local concerns.²⁸

In achieving these goals, ISAR and its grantees faced certain obstacles. The governments in Central Asia are not particularly interested in the development of democracy, civil society, or the NGO sector. At best, Kazakhstan tolerates the growth of the NGO sector and provides moral support where organizations are meeting needs that administrative agencies don't want to or are unable to finance. At worst, the Turkmen government is outwardly hostile to NGOs, refuses to register both indigenous and international organizations, and harasses existing organizations on a regular basis. ISAR should be commended for managing to navigate and achieve results in these difficult environments. Some of the failures to achieve expected civil society impacts, outlined below, can be traced directly to the political, economic, social, and legal complexities of the countries in which they are operating. External factors that cannot be easily solved through changes in ISAR's approach or that ISAR is not best placed to address include:

- Lack of a middle class to support NGO activities and underdeveloped cultures/infrastructures for fundraising, philanthropy, and volunteerism;
- Relatively undeveloped NGO sector in CAR in which environmental NGOs must operate and seek support;

²⁵ See Enclosures 1 and 2, USAID/ISAR Cooperative Agreement, CCN-0003-A-00-3048-00, signed May 10, 1993.

²⁶ Statement of Work, August 20, 1996 Amendment to the USAID/ISAR Cooperative Agreement, CCN-003-A-00-3048-00.

²⁷ September 12, 1994 Amendment to the USAID/ISAR Cooperative Agreement, CCN-003-A-00-3048-00.

²⁸ April 20, 1998, and September 21, 1999, Amendments to the USAID/ISAR Cooperative Agreement, CCN-003-A-00-3048-00.

- Lack of interest in environmental NGOs on the part of other donors;
- Difficulties with official registration and government harassment;
- Underdeveloped NGO legislative framework, including a lack of social contracting legislation and unfavorable tax regimes;
- Poor implementation of existing laws by Ministries of Justice and Tax Inspectorates;
- General lack of satisfactory banking procedures for opening official bank accounts and distributing monies;
- Communications problems, including high phone and e-mail costs and unreliable regional communication service; and
- Undeveloped independent press to report on NGO activities and support public awareness campaigns.

► **ISAR has contributed to an increase in the number of registered and non-registered NGOs, as well as the geographic diversification of the environmental movement.** Though it is difficult to get accurate figures for the most recent number of NGOs in Central Asia because of various levels of registration, either in capitals or local towns, and because many groups remain unregistered, Counterpart International's database for Central Asia listed 80 environmental NGOs operating in Kazakhstan, 20 in Turkmenistan, and 38 in Uzbekistan that existed and were registered as of late 2000. This is a clear numerical increase since the first NGO directories were published by the FSU Ministry of Environmental Protection and subsequently by the Socio-Ecological Union with ISAR assistance in the early 1990s — they listed 16 NGOs in Kazakhstan, one to three in Turkmenistan, and four to five in Uzbekistan.

The official figures, quoted by Freedom House in its annual *Nations in Transition* report, suggest that there were 3,050 NGOs officially registered in Kazakhstan in early 1997 (another figure is approximately 6,000 officially registered, according to the Ministry of Information, as quoted in *The 2000 NGO Sustainability Index*), 2,300 registered by the Ministry of Justice in Uzbekistan, and 200 registered and unregistered NGOs and groups in Turkmenistan (*The 2000 NGO Sustainability Index*). These figures may be very misleading, particularly as, in accordance with Counterpart International estimates, only about 814 NGOs were fully functioning in Kazakhstan as of October 2000, i.e., less than 26 percent or 13 percent of the above-cited numbers. It is also rather difficult to judge to what extent ISAR-supported programs contributed to the above numerical growth.

While the Kazakhstan Ministry of Justice claims that there are about 6,800 registered noncommercial organizations, figures from sources within the NGO sector suggest that there are few operational organizations. For example, CASDIN, an NGO resource center in Almaty, believes that there are not more than 700-800 active NGOs, including approximately 180 environmental NGOs, in the country.²⁹ “In Turkmenistan there are at least 40 – 50 environmental NGOs, based on Counterpart data, but nobody has precisely counted” (Environmental NGOs round-table, Ashgabad, May 28, 2001). “Nation-wide, in Uzbekistan, there are about 33–38 *de facto* and *de jure* environmental NGOs, out of about 2,500 NGOs registered by Ministry of Justice.” (Alexander Zuev, “Ecopolis,” Environmental NGOs roundtable, Tashkent, June 4, 2001.)

► **ISAR's programs have successfully jump-started and contributed to the sustainability of an NGO-based environmental movement comprising a core group of approximately 40 strong organizations and**

²⁹ Ms. Gulmira Djamanova, Executive Director, “CASDIN” Central Asian Sustainable Development Information Network, in an interview on May 25, 2001.

approximately 200 smaller organizations and initiative groups. ISAR's program has focused on specific components of the NGO sustainability equation, including organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, and infrastructure.³⁰ In terms of these factors and on the basis of findings in *The 2000 NGO Sustainability Index*, the environmental movements in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan seem to be ahead of the broader NGO communities in their countries.

► **ISAR's programs have assisted in the emergence of an indigenous support infrastructure.** While ISAR's mandate has not included, with the exception of the Atyrau Resource Center, the establishment of a sustainable support infrastructure for environmental NGOs, its support to the environmental movement has caused the emergence of an indigenous support infrastructure. ISAR's approach of tapping human resources of stronger NGOs to serve on advisory boards, disseminate information, and assist initiative groups in designing projects has resulted in a core of independent service organizations that provide services to weaker NGOs on a formal or informal basis. There is a well-developed network of mentors and umbrella organizations within the environmental community, and particularly among ISAR grantees and partners. Even though there is an elite that sometimes exercises too much control over ISAR programming, a majority of the strong organizations in the environmental movement have received ISAR support and have gone on to help emerging groups.

Several early ISAR grantees in the region have grown into resource centers for environmental organizations, and a few have received funding through the Soros NPO for NPO Program and from other donors. In Kazakhstan, ISAR supported the start-up of an NGO printing house, and in Turkmenistan, an ISAR grant supported free e-mail access for NGOs. The shut-down of independent ISPs in Turkmenistan temporarily halted Internet services, but e-mail is once again being provided. In Atyrau and in other regional and capital cities, NGO training and technical assistance resources are emerging thanks to start-up funding from ISAR. Most of these organizations are now funded by other donors, but, in many cases, ISAR provided early funding for start-up or gap funding.

In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, forums of environmental NGOs are emerging and in time are likely to serve as lobbying groups for NGOs and professionals in the field.

► **ISAR programs have assisted in building the organizational capacity of grantees.** Evaluators encountered a number of organizations that have fulltime, regular staff and have an advanced capacity to govern and operate, but still need more advanced training.

The Seeds of Democracy program effectively supported the growth of a core group of strong NGOs in major cities in Central Asia. Many of the organizations, for which ISAR has provided grant funding for projects, partnerships and travel, training; technical assistance, and access to the Internet, have become leaders in the environmental field. *ISAR's programs can be credited with providing sustaining support to early activists, who comprised the first wave of citizen participation in the post-Soviet republics and during the slow decline of the prominence of environmental agendas in the communities of Central Asia.* Of course, the majority of these organizations have only one or two charismatic leaders, and their sustainability would be threatened by a departure of leadership. However, umbrella organizations are emerging, and in capital cities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, some of these organizations are transitioning into more transparent organizations with more equitably distributed responsibility and authority.

Likewise, ISAR has served as a catalyst for the emergence and growth of small environmental NGOs in cities and towns outside of capitals and major industrial centers, and the Remote Grants Program (also

³⁰ Elements identified are from *The 2000 NGO Sustainability Index*, United States Agency for International Development, Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, Office of Democracy and Governance, January 2001. See pp. 10-13.

called the "Periphery Program") is continuing to build this regional foundation. Many organization members participated in local resolution of environmental issues and in concrete projects on an independent basis for the first time. Primary lessons in organizational development are still being learned, and, in most cases, have not yet been digested.

► **ISAR could do more to support financial viability.** While ISAR cannot single-handedly improve the economic situation of Central Asian countries, it could have greater impact on the financial viability of NGOs by doing more to encourage NGOs and provide them with the skills need to attract local resources.

To the best knowledge of many NGO leaders themselves, as well as donor community representatives, when asked during interviews the direct question on NGO sustainability, only about 20 percent to 30 percent of existing NGOs would survive at their current level of operations if the donor support is discontinued today. Many interviewed NGOs stated that they would not have survived without support from ISAR programs. Multiple groups that had received emergency funding through discretionary grants noted that the gap funding provided by ISAR was instrumental in allowing the organization to continue functioning and obtain further support from other sources. In regional locations such as Nukus, the Furgana Valley, and Atyrau, growth in the number of NGOs can be clearly linked to ISAR's facilitation and encouragement of citizen participation in environmental causes.

► **ISAR grantees have generated additional sources of funding and created interdependencies with other NGOs by moving on to participate in other donor programs and collaborate with clients of other providers.** Previous and current ISAR grantees are active in other USAID partners' programs and projects, and ISAR strives to provide information about other opportunities to its clients through its bulletins; ISAR has not done enough to coordinate with other providers or formalize possibilities for ISAR clients to participate and gain from other existing programs.

Grantees reported that funding from ISAR helped prepare them to receive larger grants from other grant-making organizations, including the Eurasia Foundation, Counterpart, ABA/CEELI (EPAC), and the Soros Foundation (NPO for NPO). The evaluation team noted with satisfaction that a number of ISAR grantees have applied for and received grants from the referred MFIs and international organizations. Many grantees stressed that their experience with preparing and implementing ISAR grants helped them to prepare these project proposals as they were more familiar with various grant application procedures and requirements. At least two ISAR grantees are currently serving as resources to other NGOs through the Soros NPO for NPO program. Former ISAR grantees in all three countries regularly participate in Counterpart training and/or have received grants from Counterpart. A handful of organizations have received funding from the Eurasia Foundation to pursue nonenvironmental programs, and at least one ISAR grantee is working with ABA/CEELI on the EPAC program. Several grantees have also received follow-on support from, *inter alia*, the Embassy of the Netherlands, United States Democracy Commissions, and the Global Environmental Fund. ISAR's strongest grantees, mostly early recipients of the Seeds of Democracy Program, are regular resources or advisors to UNDP, OSCE, and TACIS programs.

In Uzbekistan, ISAR's Remote Grants Program has served as one of the bases of the emerging Ecological Forum, which is now receiving assistance and support from ABA/CEELI and OSCE. Through ISAR, the Uzbek forum has made contact with the already existing Kazakh forum in order to benefit from lessons learned. More importantly, the emerging Uzbek forum "expects to work with representatives of the environmental movement from every region thanks to ISAR funding through the Remote Grants Program."³¹

³¹ Zueev, Alexander, Ecopolis, at a roundtable in Tashkent, June 4, 2001.

► ***The impact of ISAR programs on citizen participation and public image falls somewhat short of expectations.*** Approximately 20 percent of ISAR grantees have built substantial constituencies or attracted citizens to participate in environmental activism.³² While organizations involving youth and one-time event projects have been extremely successful at attracting members, volunteers and participants to their programs, most ISAR NGOs have not dramatically increased citizen participation in their activities. In general, most of environmental NGOs in CAR remain underdeveloped and small (with about four to eight active members, many of whom are family members, friends, and former colleagues, and a dozen volunteers), and they do not have national or regional outreach. Many are headed by “charismatic” leaders who have many other commitments and are often engaged in activities remotely related to supporting the actual environmental and social needs of local communities.

► ***There is increasing engagement of NGOs in advocacy and environmental decision-making, but there is still a great deal of work to be done in this area.*** Core organizations have participated in decision-making at both the local and national levels and have improved advocacy, networking, and information-sharing skills. Emerging participants have made first steps toward resolving finite local environmental concerns, increasing public awareness of environmental issues, networking with other groups at the local, national, and regional levels, and developing basic project management capacity. Both groups of organizations have begun to grapple with internal organizational challenges, the resolution of which will determine the extent to which the environmental movement as a whole will become sustainable over the long term.

► ***ISAR has provided replicable models for supporting the growth of viable NGOs and communities of organizations.*** The Atyrau NGO Resource Center and the Caspian Sea Program have presented two different (geographical and topical) comprehensive approaches to NGO sector development. Elements of each of these approaches could be replicated by ISAR in order to galvanize the successes achieved in the two core programs and by other implementers to improve their programs. ARC has essentially jump-started the NGO sector in the city by providing virtually all of the services an NGO would need to start functioning and implementing programs. The Caspian Sea Program has initiated a network of organizations united by a common interest in the environmental health of their communities around one body of water. Targeted training, as well as relationship-building among NGOs through conferences, partnership grants, and e-mail connections, has supported this program. In both cases, participating organizations have become more sustainable by developing confidence, building interdependencies, increasing professional knowledge through access to information, and implementing projects.

ISAR grantees in locations with Counterpart Resource Centers participate actively in Counterpart programs and network with Counterpart clients. For example, the Dozhagus Ecological Club mentors some Counterpart clients; and in the Nukus area, Ata-makan’s president not only attends Counterpart training programs on a regular basis but also participates in a loose network of community development organizations that have received training, technical assistance, or grants from Counterpart.

Environmental Impact

The CA between ISAR and USAID and subsequent amendments clearly set forth and adjusted *environmental objectives* for all five consecutive programs in CAR, namely: a) develop an overall picture of the environmental situation and the state of the green movement in CAR, b) support environmental NGOs in the region, c) promote and strengthen environmental public awareness, including awareness of the environmental impacts of oil development in the Caspian basin, d) build linkages and joint activities between U.S. and CAR environmental NGOs, e) promote exchange of environmental information and accountability, and f) support environmental quality improvement.

³² Figure is an estimate based on extrapolation of data gathered through interviews and questionnaire responses.

To achieve these objectives, ISAR intended to: a) provide necessary training and means of communication to local environmental NGOs, b) educate local citizens and inform local policymakers on environmental issues, c) publicize environmental issues, and d) support projects that support, *inter alia*, local clean-up, wild-life protection, reduction in radiation levels or toxic waste disposal, cessation of environmental harmful activities, etc.

The announced expected *outcomes* were intended to lead to an increase in: a) the number of environmental NGOs, b) NGOs' geographic representation, i.e., creation of a sustainable environmental movement outside the nations' capitals, c) the number of project proposals from countries with a less-developed civil society, and d) the number of implemented projects supportive of environmental issues and beneficial to local communities.

The overall *impact* of ISAR-supported programs will cause and raise: a) media interest in environmental issues and NGOs, b) government recognition of NGOs' role in environmental protection, c) environmental improvements, d) public awareness, and e) environmental policy changes as may become "evident by official decrees and documents, and practical action."

To monitor implementation of programs and projects and to measure how ISAR activities contributed to meeting USAID Strategic Objectives, ISAR intended to develop *quantitative* and *qualitative indicators* that might have included: a) number of environmental NGOs in the region, b) sustainability of NGOs in terms of years of operation, the amounts and types of funding, and types of issues NGOs promote, c) increased NGO capacity to provide support to environmental health programs in CAR, and d) capability of CAR NGOs to seek and receive funding from sources other than ISAR.

► ***There is a disconnect between all of the above-enumerated objectives, outcomes, impacts, and indicators***, particularly between their scope, focus, and level of effort, and intended results on the ground. Environmental strategy and priorities were rather vaguely defined in *spatial* (national, regional, local, or community), *media* (air, water, soil, forestry, biodiversity, etc.), *sectoral* (industry, energy, agriculture, water, and sanitation), and *institutional* (organizational development, capacity-building, education, awareness and media outreach, targeted audiences, legislation, etc.) terms. These in turn were inadequately translated into a logical, consistent, replicable sequence of participatory projects with measurable environmental benefits evident on the local, regional, and national levels.

► ***Achievement of visible environmental improvements was more modest than was expected, but this shortfall is primarily attributable to forces outside of ISAR's control.*** In spite of some reduction of on-going pollution and stabilization of further degradation of environmental conditions due to closure of many enterprises, lack of economic activity, and implementation of foreign-funded projects, and some improvements in environmental and social institutional frameworks, the vector and speed of environmentally and socially sustainable development in CAR, with certain variations, depend mostly on the political and economic climate in an individual country. Environmental improvements and sustainable development are hindered by:

- Lack of clarity in and overlaps among environmental, social, investment, and other legislation, which are continuously undergoing revisions and therefore decreasing stability in environmental laws;
- Poor compliance monitoring, inadequate enforcement, and arbitrary decision-making;
- Diversity and severity of CAR environmental problems;

- Permanent restructuring of governmental agencies entrusted with sectoral and media environmental management, quite often combined with the downgrading of their status within public administration hierarchy;
- Inadequate budgetary allocations for environmental activities that cause weakening of professional and managerial capabilities, deterioration of already outdated environmental monitoring equipment, and closure of existing monitoring programs, and a subsequent lack of reliable and current environmental data for planning and decision-making purposes; and
- Political restrictions on the free flow of information and on discussions of environmental problems and their causes, and a negative attitude towards NGOs.

► **Taking into account funding levels, ISAR successfully supported** the a) creation and spreading of environmental NGOs in all CAR, both in capitals and on regional and local levels, and NGO networking, b) development of a number of selected experienced NGOs in each CAR that would become sustainable in the next few years, c) increase in environmental media outreach and information dissemination, environmental education, and public awareness efforts, d) appearance of a reserved government recognition of environmental NGOs' activities and implementation of selected projects as well as of attraction of financial resources that substitute for state funding, and e) implementation of a number of local environmentally beneficial projects focusing on community clean-up, waste minimization and recycling, tree planting and biodiversity preservation, sustainable new agricultural practices, clean water supply, energy conservation, eco-tourism, environmental education, etc.

► **ISAR did not achieve its expected impact in the area of policy change.** Though eligible under ISAR's programs, the team did not find credible evidence of ISAR intentionally spearheading activities or any ISAR-sponsored CAR NGOs' project that was specifically designed and aimed at advocating and lobbying environmental legislation, getting involved in environmental policy or program development and discussions, EAs (EIAs/SEEs) for projects in various sectors of economy, or being involved into a controversial decision-making process. Most references we heard were of an anecdotal nature (such as why and how a leader of one CAR signed a decree on accession to the Aarhus Convention), or unrelated to projects supported by ISAR. Most of environmental policies, programs, legislation, and conventions are elaborated and discussed exclusively at the government level and within multilateral and bilateral relations, where NGOs are invited on case-by-case basis.

Where ISAR grantees have participated in targeted advocacy programs, including preparation of National Environmental Action Plans, UNDP projects, etc., they work in their individual professional capacity and because of their personal contacts with governmental officials in charge of any given project. It is difficult to trace the source of the prominence of NGO leaders who are lobbying in this manner; however, in Turkmenistan, all such individuals had received funding from ISAR at some point, and in all countries, advocacy NGOs stressed the importance of ISAR funding to their survival and development.

► **The impact on public awareness of environmental issues has been variable among individual projects, programs, and geographies.** ISAR's general approach has been to support concrete projects that indirectly foster public awareness rather than to support campaigns purely aimed at information dissemination or publicizing of environmental issues. Therefore, the increases in public awareness have been dependent upon the extent to which individual organizations have sought to publicize their activities, recruit volunteers, distribute materials, and work with local media and government. Projects that have required broader citizen participation to achieve results have therefore been the most effective in building public awareness, while projects that have required narrow environmental expertise or could be achieved by a small group have been less useful in achieving public awareness and participation.

B. Program Strategy and Implementation

Strengths

► **ISAR's strategic planning, program development, and grant-making processes embody the democratic values that USAID programs seek to instill in Central Asian culture and should serve as a model for other grant-making programs and efforts to develop local philanthropy.** ISAR has paid close attention to achieving a democratic and transparent grant-making process. ISAR's programs have continued to evolve because of ongoing monitoring and consistent solicitation of feedback from clients and observers. In its most recent strategic planning process, ISAR solicited the opinions of over 80 grantees, clients, Advisory Board members, and observers. ISAR's review process has evolved over time and reflects extensive gathering of feedback from reviewers, grantees and applicants. The grant-making process is not yet perfect, but ISAR is clearly aware of this and is finding ways to address issues of conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and balancing of insiders' knowledge with objective grant-making. Evaluators witnessed healthy ongoing discussion of topics related to Advisory Board rotation, grant review criteria, ability of multiple members of umbrella groups to receive funding, etc. It should be noted that ISAR's procedures are sometimes the consequences of bad experience, but ISAR has conscientiously addressed issues as they have arisen and has avoided overreaction by consulting local actors. NGOs and observers perceive ISAR's grant-making process as fair and democratic. In this sense, ISAR is particularly well placed to contribute to USAID/CAR's new Strategic Objective 2.1: Strengthened democratic culture among citizens and targeted institutions.

► **ISAR's approach of providing extremely small amounts of money and not funding salaries has led to a higher survival rate among funded groups than among groups funded by other similar grant-makers.** Overall, ISAR grant amounts are well-matched to the scale of the actual projects. In other words, grantees generally are not attempting to take on issues that they as organizations or that ISAR funding cannot adequately address. The limited size of ISAR grants ensures that grantees do not build infrastructure and staffs that cannot be supported at the end of the grant period. In comparison to recipients of other donor funds in the region, ISAR grantees are less likely to disappear after the end of the grant period. Equally important, based on ISAR's approach, ISAR does not contribute to the growth of "DONGOs." As with other sections of this report, it is difficult to quantify ISAR's success because of the lack of a database that tracks the progress of organizations during and after grant funding; however, approximately 70 percent of organizations interviewed said that they would continue to operate if ISAR or other donor funding were to disappear.

ISAR grantees repeatedly criticized ISAR's prohibition on salaries but noted that they would not have any problem at least operating since most staff were volunteers. Some NGOs complained that the salary ban translates into limited organizational effectiveness because volunteer staff members have less time to devote to the organization and work cannot be accomplished during regular working hours. Additionally, the salary policy may contribute to the high number of applications received from initiative groups formed by employees of government scientific, research, and administrative agencies. While staff members generally receive salaries, funds to support their research costs, such as computers, access to the Internet, materials, etc., are no longer funded. These grantees generally claim that they are applying to do work that is outside the scope of their government jobs. However, job descriptions at these institutions are usually so vague that it is difficult to draw a line between extracurricular activities and simple improvements in existing work.

Overall, ISAR grantees are more likely to be committed to their stated missions than organizations funded by other donors in the region. ISAR has made painstaking attempts to ensure that organizations not invent

environmental missions in order to receive grant support. ISAR's prohibition on funding of salaries to a great extent ensures that initiative groups that apply for funding are genuinely interested in accomplishing the goals they state in their application. While evaluators cannot provide empirical evidence of this commitment to mission, the assessment methodology included interviews with organizations not funded by ISAR and grantees of other donors. Comparatively, ISAR clients tended to speak of their organization as a whole and how funding contributed to short- and long-term goals rather than of "projects."³³

► ***ISAR's approach to organizations as partners has contributed to its high success rate in assisting start-up organizations.*** Overall, ISAR staff members are highly regarded by NGOs because of their collegial attitude, willingness to provide information and assistance, and understanding approach to all NGOs, whether grantees, applicants, or simply visitors to the library. NGO representatives feel that ISAR staff members are always willing to help. Consequently, NGOs seem to be more honest than they might be with other donors when they face difficulties in fulfilling grant projects. This openness allows ISAR to take steps to save projects and organizations that might otherwise fail.

► ***ISAR has maintained sound financial and programmatic records on its grant recipients.*** ISAR's one-on-one approach to grant proposal development and grant management ensures that grantees are actually conducting the activities for which they requested funds and are expending ISAR funds only as authorized. When ISAR is able to travel freely to conduct site visits, its monitoring seems to be of high quality. Grant managers are extremely knowledgeable about the grantees with which they work and demonstrated a high degree of insight into the workings of individual organizations. While ISAR needs to improve its own process of evaluation, as well as training for grantees in self-evaluation (see below under Weaknesses), ISAR's project monitoring seems to be solid. In comparison to the Eurasia Foundation, Counterpart, TACIS, HIVOS (Dutch government), and UNDP, ISAR can be quite certain that organizations that receive funding are conscientiously fulfilling their programmatic and financial obligations under the grant. Evaluators did not see or hear of *any grantee* that was willfully misappropriating funds or purposely seeking only to fulfill the formal requirements of grants. This is not to say that every grant was fulfilled successfully or with equal commitment, but the assessment team did not see evidence of or suspect misappropriation of funds that typically accounts for at least a small percentage of grant programs in the NIS.

► ***ISAR has satisfactorily fulfilled its objective to create connections among organizations in accordance with the goals and expected results of each program.*** Because ISAR does not keep record of contact facilitation, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which organizations have been linked with regional and international organizations on a regular basis. The Expert Exchange Program has facilitated contacts in the region, but only a few Expert Exchange grants have been made in Central Asia. Discretionary grants also support travel, but it is more difficult to identify these grants because ISAR does not have a grant management system or database in place in Central Asia.

Grantees report that CaspInfo has provided information to help organizations develop partnerships with other organizations within and outside of Central Asia.

Anecdotal information suggests that connections were facilitated more often during the Seeds of Democracy Program than as part of the Remote Grants Program; however, there are no numerical data to prove this claim. To a great extent, the facilitation of contacts depends on the energy, contacts, and knowledge of the grant managers. If ISAR renews its collaboration and contact with other international

³³ An interesting phenomenon seems to have emerged among NGOs in Central Asia. Many organizations use the term "project" in place of the term grant or financing. Organizations speak of "receiving a project" rather than of finding financing to pursue an activity or objective.

donors and with other ISAR offices, increased opportunities for grantee connections with one another and other organizations should naturally increase.

In instances where ISAR has facilitated contact, organizations have taken good advantage of opportunities to learn from others, attract resources, and exchange information. For example, ISAR assisted the Chokrak Ornithological Station in Kazakhstan to contact an Israeli organization that helped the station obtain quality marking rings. Contacts made with an American group helped the center find information about prices and quality of ring presses in the United States. Ongoing contact with an American scientist has also led to paid visits by scientists from the United States and the Netherlands.

Persent (see Annex 1, Success Stories) in Nukus is perhaps the best example of how ISAR's help in making contact with western organizations can make a difference. ISAR originally provided the director with a \$100 grant to help defray her costs to attend a women's leadership conference in London in 1991. That was the push that she needed to start her own organization to work on women's health. Her work in this area eventually led her to look into ecological issues and a cooperative grant with Ecologia in Pennsylvania, which provided monitoring equipment. Persent now serves over 15,000 people in the region. Last year, the director won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize.

Weaknesses

► ***ISAR's strategy lacks a clear connection between its goals and objectives on one hand, and its strategy, activities, and expected results on the other hand.*** ISAR programs in Central Asia have suffered from a disconnect between stated goals, activities, and expected results. This disconnect is visible in each of ISAR's proposals and should have been corrected by USAID staff in the course of negotiating the original Cooperative Agreement and each of the amendments or modifications. For example, in its proposal to USAID for the Remote Grants Program, ISAR repeatedly stated the goal of involving *communities* in environmental decision-making and activating *citizens* to participate in resolving concrete problems in their communities. However, the expected results focus primarily on NGO organizational capabilities and management, project design, and project implementation skills rather than on outreach to citizens and public awareness

This lack of definition has trickled down and affected ISAR's ability to create clear strategies, program parameters, and selection criteria for grants and program participants. Ultimately, the grants made are a reflection of this lack of focus on the beneficiaries of environmental programs, namely the public. For example, the score sheets used by reviewers to evaluate projects do not reflect the goals of ISAR's program — to involve citizens in decision-making processes and improve public awareness of environmental issues. ISAR has purposely put more emphasis on the accomplishment of concrete environmental projects than on citizen participation in its grant-making. In other words, a program aimed solely at informing citizens of their environmental rights or at lobbying would be unlikely to garner support. Further, organizations are asked to provide distribution plans and estimates of citizen participation, but, in practice, reviewers do not put emphasis on these areas. Evaluators found only a few groups that actively sought out volunteers or citizen participants in a strategic manner. And, based on interview responses, evaluators believe that most materials published by ISAR are distributed to other NGOs rather than to the public at large.

► ***Programs are overly controlled and driven by a handful of environmental movement elite NGOs leaders.*** The development of ISAR's program and thus the ecological movement as a whole was somewhat skewed by the limited circle of organizations with which ISAR made initial contact at the beginning of its work in Central Asia. While ISAR began its work in Central Asia with a solid foundation of experience working in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet countries, it did not have a broad contact base in Central Asia. Most of the environmentalists with whom ISAR began its work were members or

partners of the Social-Ecological Union (SEU), founded in the late 1980s with affiliates in each of the Soviet republics.³⁴ At the time, there were other initiative groups in place in the region that were not already part of ISAR's network that may have been overlooked and consequently did not receive funding or support.

SEU representatives were the first to receive funding and support from ISAR through the Seeds of Democracy Program, and most have built and maintained strong reputations in CAR. However, it should also be noted that while ISAR has widened its circle of contacts and organizations with which it works, these original recipients, through their heavy participation in advisory boards and funding of initiative groups linked to them, have essentially remained the driving forces of the program.

ISAR's greatest strength — its dependence on local environmental leaders to develop programs and select organizations for funding — is also, in some cases, its greatest weakness. Advisory Board members have different roles and responsibilities depending on the program, but, overall, they wield a huge amount of power since they make final decisions on grant selections for all programs. Advisory Board members are repeatedly approached for advice about program directions, review criteria, and initial evaluation of prospective partners and grantees. Ongoing feedback from knowledgeable members of the environmental movement has been important in ensuring that ISAR is generally in tune with emerging environmental issues in the region. However, as is endemic in the NGO sector throughout the former Soviet Union, many strong NGOs are led by strong personalities who have their own strong biases from both a professional and a personal perspective. By working almost exclusively with pure environmentalists and the most active and articulate NGO leaders, ISAR has sometimes missed opportunities to learn about new groups that have not been brought along by the environmental elite.

As in most NGO sectors in the former Soviet Union, the ecological movement in Central Asia is severely stratified in terms of skills, participation in subsector events, and access to foreign donor funding and programs. While ISAR's programs have helped support the emergence of new organizations and the strengthening of existing NGOs, ISAR funding has also helped a small elite group of organizations become more powerful. In some instances, these organizations have turned away from foreign donor funding, including support from ISAR, and have focused on their own development and assistance to new groups. However, other organizations have turned their back on newly emerging organizations with the excuse that new groups are weak, unprofessional, and interested only in obtaining foreign funds.

In the worst case of elitism, the two leading organizations in Turkmenistan have a virtual lock on access to the foreign donor community and to environmental information. Both of these organizations call themselves "umbrella organizations" and claim that they have supported the start-up of multiple initiative groups that have become members. To a certain extent this is true and has been important because they are both registered organizations, a rarity in Turkmenistan at this time. However, initiative groups made up of spouses and other relatives dominate both organizations. Neither organization has selection criteria for membership. ISAR supported the purchase of equipment so that one of these organizations, CATENA, could build a library with support from other donors. CATENA did build this library, but because of its own internal crisis and inability to raise adequate funds, it lost its space and the library resources have been in storage for over a year. Because, at the same time, CATENA has refused to share

³⁴ ISAR's perception that SEU contacts in the CAR would help to significantly reach out to the existing environmental movement was very narrow. Though SEU was and continues to be one of the most successful NGOs in the FSU and Russia today, it "had only a handful of contacts in each area, and communication between regions was almost nonexistent. [SEU] acted more as an informational network and Moscow lobbying group than as an umbrella for mass movement." (See: Jane I Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism. Anti-nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine*, Duke University Press, 1996, 5. Russia: The Demand for Local Self-determination, footnote 2, p. 192.)

information and assist small, new environmental NGOs, a group of 14 of these newcomers created an association of NGOs in January 2000. The association now has over 40 members and has established its own resource center.

Two members from each of these two leading organizations participate in ISAR Advisory Boards.

► ***ISAR has not maintained a database or gathered information that would allow it to demonstrate and measure impacts, results, and progress toward objectives.*** The team did not receive an answer as to why ISAR, the organization that claimed back in 1992 to have the best knowledge of CAR environmental NGOs and which remained the only one that had supported exclusively environmental NGOs in CAR for over eight years, did not have this information. Nor did ISAR conduct an ongoing assessment of environmental NGOs' development and evolution, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, as it had committed itself to doing under the CA. As the evaluation team witnessed in the field, ISAR might have easily done this job, using existing application forms, or fine-tuning them slightly to routinely conduct qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sector.

► ***ISAR currently lacks the capability to provide access to professional environmental expertise or, in some instances, appropriate organizational development assistance to its grantees.*** Many of ISAR's early grantees have grown out of the assistance ISAR currently provides but are still in need of management assistance and professional environmental expertise. In most cases, leaders of the elite environmental NGOs and/or most respected ISAR NGOs are at the top of their field and are some of the most experienced environmental scientists remaining in their countries. These leaders have the technical expertise to run complex programs and lobby effectively; however, some of them badly need technical assistance to sort out management issues in their organizations. These leaders are unlikely to participate in or benefit from basic training as remedial measures and highly tailored recommendations are necessary to move their organizations forward. Therefore, these groups should be provided with targeted short-term management consulting similar to that which a healthy American NGO might solicit on an intermittent basis. Important areas of assistance would include management consultancy to organization directors, including delegation of authority, strategic planning, succession strategy formulation, revision of mission and vision, independent board formation, and structural and human resources strategy (definition of members, participants, staff, volunteers, etc., and priority setting for attraction and retention of each group).

More advanced environmental organizations do not turn to ISAR for technical assistance on environmental issues, and these organizations report that ISAR staff members are not qualified to give assistance in technical areas because they have virtually no professional environmental expertise and experience. Nonetheless, most organizations lack professional environmental skills, access to specialists such as environmental attorneys and industry experts/consultants, and in depth environmental resources. Every organization does not need its own environmental attorney, but every organization does need to know how to identify its need for expertise and access appropriate sources of information or assistance. The most advanced organizations know how to access local specialists but do not have adequate access to international sources of information. Less-experienced NGOs cannot currently turn to ISAR for assistance in identifying needs or identifying the best experts.

► ***There is too little focus on developing the professional skills of NGOs, and this limits organizations' impact in increasing public awareness, attracting citizen participation in programs, and representing communities in local and national decision-making.*** Because of limited funds, ISAR has focused much less on the development of management, strategic planning, outreach, advocacy, governance, and other basic skills through training. Most of the services and assistance received by grantees from ISAR come from the grant managers. However, the grant managers themselves have had little or NGO management

experience and are not always qualified to provide training or technical assistance. Even when ISAR had an extensive training program, there seems to have been too little focus on outreach in the community.

► ***The full potential impact of grants was, in some cases, lost because of a lack of focus on outreach, advocacy, and information dissemination.*** Many early projects were sound and useful from an environmental perspective but served a closed audience. Recipients were highly professional environmental scientists but were either not interested or unable to attract broad citizen support and participation in their programs. For example, in Nukus, the Union for the Defense of the Aral Sea and the Amu-Darya River conducted an ISAR demonstration project to show that plastic bags could be converted into asphalt for tennis courts. Rather than recruiting volunteers among tennis enthusiasts or the population at large, the Union paid people to collect used plastic bags for the project. Brochures about the project were distributed at regional NGO conferences but not to local libraries, Makhalas, community-based groups, schools, local government, etc. This approach ensured that the community did not have a stake in the project and wiped out the potential domino effect, which is the basis for demonstration projects for civil society development. If citizens do not participate and demonstrate empowerment to themselves and their neighbors, there is no expansion of citizen participation as the result of a concrete project. Similarly, the Union's information resource center, which is meant to be a hub for resources on the Aral Sea, serves, on average, six to eight people per month, of whom two to three are generally foreigners. The Union does not advertise its services to the local community.

There can be a certain connection between achievement of environmental impact and activation of citizens. Often, public awareness projects that do not necessarily achieve a recognizable short-term environmental impact will create greater citizen engagement than projects that will be able to show clear environmental improvements. However, even in the case of projects aimed narrowly at environmental impact, good outreach and information dissemination plans can engage citizens. Outreach and information dissemination does not have to be expensive, but it must be well planned and closely connected with public awareness goals for the project. Slight shifts in emphasis in grant application materials, tightening of review criteria, institution of performance standards for information and dissemination, and focused training seminars in these areas would do a great deal to improve outcomes. Additionally, addition of nonenvironmentalist NGO representatives with substantial outreach experience onto Advisory Boards might counterbalance the typical environmentalist response that citizens aren't qualified to participate in environmental projects on more than a one-time basis.

► ***While ISAR monitors project progress, it often fails to evaluate grant performance in terms of ultimate impact adequately.*** There is difference between *monitoring* and *evaluation* of projects. Monitoring provides information about how equipment is being used, what activities are being conducted, how grant funds have been expended. It is generally quantitative and descriptive. Evaluation suggests analysis of impact and organizational contribution to results. Evaluation covers such questions as "why results are or are not being achieved," as well as issues regarding "relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability." Evaluations provide recommendations for program improvements or strategy adjustment.³⁵ The ISAR grant management process provides little formal or objective evaluation. Grant managers speak informally with grantees about how they might improve their work, but performance indicators and evaluation methodologies are inadequately thought through at the beginning of the project. Grantees are not provided with the tools or requirements that could ensure that they evaluate their own work critically and continue to grow their strategies and programs through lessons learned.

► ***While ISAR maintains informal contact with grantees after completion of grants or training, there has been a general lack of follow-on activities to ensure sustainability and replicability of projects.*** In

³⁵ *Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Tips*, USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation, Number 11, 1997.

terms of civil society impact and sustainability of environmental impact, the story line of most projects does not end (or even truly begin) until well after the grant period has ended. For example, the building of a community water pipeline might require three months of funding, but issues regarding maintenance, distribution of water, control and authority, replication, etc. might not arise until nine months after the grant period has ended. Because ISAR does not maintain a database or formally track outcomes past the grant period or depreciation of equipment, the most important lessons learned, successes and failures of projects, are often lost.

C. Outreach, Networking, Communications, and Information

Strengths

► ***ISAR has been adept at navigating the political landscape and cultures in which it operates and provides valuable information on the environment and NGO development.*** ISAR's library in Almaty is one of the primary sources of environmental and ecological information for environmental organizations in Kazakhstan and the region. Organizations universally reported the usefulness of the library as both a place to meet other environmental groups and an information resource. Both applicants and non-applicants noted that they make a point of stopping by the ISAR office whenever they are in town in order to check out new materials, get contacts, and solicit advice from ISAR staff. Overall, NGOs feel that the information provided at the library is useful and appropriate to their needs. The impact of this resource was visible. Kazakh NGO representatives are generally informed about environmental and NGO issues, and it is clear that organizations are utilizing the materials they access at the center.

► ***ISAR works hard and is successful at partnering with local organizations and taking advantage of the expertise its grant-making program has helped to develop.*** Evaluators saw multiple examples of ISAR working with local experts to provide training and technical assistance to grantees and emerging organizations. For example, CASDIN, a Kazakh recipient of a discretionary grant to cover a lapse in donor funds for its bulletin, recently conducted a seminar on bulletin writing and distribution for Atyrau Resource Center clients. Similarly, Green Salvation, which has never received an ISAR grant, recently conducted a legal seminar for ISAR grantees. Local organizations are willing to work with ISAR because it treats them like partners rather than recipients. This attitude is an important ingredient in ISAR's success in building relationships and building local environmental NGO support infrastructure in the region.

► ***ISAR's library and resources are truly accessible to the public, and experts look to ISAR's publications for professional quality content.*** ISAR not only provides access to its resources to client NGOs, any NGO or citizen can visit the library and use its resources. Aside from NGOs, journalists, and students visit the center often. CaspInfo was identified by multiple environmental professionals as one of the most valuable sources of environmental information on the region.

Weaknesses

► ***ISAR has not adequately networked with other donors and implementers.*** ISAR staff has a rather limited idea of what environmental programs are being implemented or are under preparation in CAR by various multilateral and bilateral donors, and of the policies and procedures of these donors on environment and public participation and interactions with local NGOs. Policies and procedures of all international donors require environmental assessment of proposed programs and projects, and public/local NGO participation at various stages of their development. ISAR missed the opportunity to help CAR NGOs utilize EA as a mechanism that allows local communities and NGOs to participate in

design, planning, and decision-making on multi-million dollar programs and projects that directly affect their daily lives and environment.

ISAR's coordination and collaboration with other donors and USAID/CAR's partners in the region (Counterpart, Eurasia, ABA/CEELI, etc.) has been limited, particularly over the past few years. While ISAR has provided its grantees with information about other donor programs when that information has become available, ISAR does not actively seek out collaborative relationships with other donors. In the field, ISAR often makes the assumption that its unique approach and niche do not lend themselves to joint work with other organizations. Evaluators saw multiple opportunities for ISAR to join forces with other donors and implementers to achieve greater impact in both organizations' programs. Donor and implementer representatives were almost unanimous in their ignorance of current ISAR programs and their willingness to meet with ISAR and consider collaborative projects once they had learned (from evaluators) about ISAR's work.

Many international donors and PVOs have trouble attracting enough participants to their training, technical assistance, and seminars, and would welcome ISAR grantees and clients at their events and to their own client pools. ISAR is not well known by other donors or even by other USAID implementers. In fact, the senior staff in one USAID/CAR country mission did not even know that ISAR was operating in the country. ISAR and its grantees are missing opportunities to take advantage of informational resources, training, technical assistance, joint programming, and potential funding.

► ***ISAR's library resources are limited to organizations in close proximity to Almaty.*** Turkmen and Uzbek NGOs are at a great disadvantage in terms of access to information, and they have little access to materials geared toward environmental NGOs. Their primary sources of information are CaspInfo and the ISAR bulletin, which are distributed by both e-mail and post. Unfortunately, for those who do not have e-mail, the bulletin is distributed in batches of two to three bulletins (because of high postage rates), and the information is often irrelevant by the time it arrives. Many recipients complained that application deadlines for other donor grant competitions have often passed by the time announcements are received through the bulletin.

D. Program Administration

Strengths

► ***ISAR's low administrative expenditures have supported an on-the-ground reputation for "real work."*** ISAR has an excellent reputation among local organizations and other international actors (who are aware of ISAR's work) for using funds wisely and operating in accordance with the local market. Grantees positively compared ISAR with other international donors, which are often resented for slashing grant budgets and requiring tight budget control when they are perceived as wasting money on expensive office space, equipment, unnecessary furniture, drivers, etc.

► ***ISAR's own internal management reflects good governance, respect for individuals, and transparency.*** ISAR's corporate culture should be a model for USAID-funded organizations to show the importance of building democratic culture by example. ISAR staff members are confident when they design programs and make recommendations to grantees because their democratic process has already ensured that priorities of clients on the ground have been taken into account. Further, ISAR's openness in providing information about its programs and procedures is exemplary. While representatives of another USAID partner in the region did not feel comfortable sharing their grant review criteria and forms, ISAR staff have willingly provided such information to other donors and implementers. Further, staff at ISAR feel empowered, and authority within the organization stems from knowledge, expertise, and experience rather than from title or position.

Weaknesses

► ***The success of ISAR's program is too dependent on the quality of its resident directors because of limited historical memory and institutionalized learning.*** Because of rapid turnover (see below) of ISAR directors, combined with a field-driven program approach, ISAR is often heavily dependent upon the quality of each Almaty office director. Local NGOs and observers chart ISAR's history in relation to the chronology of directors rather than programs. Some complained that it is difficult to comment on the quality of ISAR's work because it has varied so greatly over time. Organizationally, each director seems to have recreated the wheel and started from ground zero in terms of understanding the Central Asian environmental movement, entering the PVO community, and assessing strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of local programming. Quarterly reports reflect repetitive raising of issues and plans for resolution by a string of directors. In many cases, directors have not remained for adequate periods either to push through their proposals or to implement new ideas. Upon arrival of a new director, the process repeats itself. It is imperative that ISAR find ways to limit the impact of staff turnover by ensuring overlap between directors and creating *institutional* goals and memory for each office.

► ***ISAR's low salary structure makes it difficult for the organization to attract and retain quality "expatriate" staff.*** The above-noted turnover could be minimized, and better-qualified staff could be recruited, if ISAR were to offer more competitive salaries than it currently makes available. ISAR's frugal approach to programs is admirable (see above), but, in the case of regional directors and senior local staff, it is hindering achievement of excellence. ISAR has suffered from extended periods without directors, and former staff noted that they felt that ISAR would be able to attract candidates with a combination of NGO management, international development, and environmental expertise if better compensation packages were offered.

E. USAID Management of ISAR Programs

Any analysis of the impact of ISAR's programs should take into account the evolution of USAID strategy and programs over time that address some of the same NGO sector needs that ISAR originally proposed to address. ISAR's programs may seem to duplicate parts of other existing NGO activities, but it is important to remember that this is more a function of the evolution of USAID programs than a failure on ISAR's part. As one of the first small grant-makers and NGO sector development organizations on the ground in Central Asia, ISAR has extensive experience working in the region. Other organizations, including the Eurasia Foundation, ABA/CEELI, the European Union, and Counterpart International, were able to capitalize on lessons learned in ISAR's programs. Some of these organizations chose to implement small grant programs at least in part because of ISAR's successes. It is important to take into account this fact when analyzing whether or not ISAR programs duplicate work of other USAID implementers. One could argue that other implementers have chosen a broad approach that includes organizations that would otherwise be covered by ISAR's programs and may therefore be duplicating ISAR's work rather than the other way around. The Eurasia Foundation does not support environmental NGOs specifically because ISAR and other environmental grant-makers such as the Dutch and the Global Environmental Facility are on the ground.

Additionally, ISAR's CA was signed prior to reengineering of USAID. ISAR did not initially sign onto the strategic objectives, against which the evaluation team has measured its work. ISAR also initiated operations under a less structured strategic planning and performance indicator structure; therefore, some of the pre-planning that PVOs are now required to fulfill before funding in order to increase chances of success and raise implementation standards was not completed by ISAR when the program was conceptualized. Later ISAR projects do reflect adaptation of approach to new requirements, but ISAR

unfortunately did not benefit from the focused planning and strategy process from the beginning, and the legacy is that there is less clarity about objectives of the overall regional program than for new projects in Central Asia.

► ***Uncertainty and changes in ISAR's programs caused by evolving USAID priorities and CTO turnover have, in some cases, negatively affected programs; however, ISAR has recently benefited from greater supervision and support from USAID.*** During the course of interviews, ISAR was criticized often for a recent lack of cohesion and strategic vision in its programs. NGOs are completely unaware of the extent to which USAID influences ISAR's strategy in the region, and they blame ISAR for the cancellation of the Seeds of Democracy program and regional initiatives that do not clearly contribute to the development of a pan-Central Asian environmental movement. For example, many organizations located outside of the immediate Caspian Sea area or without Caspian interests criticized specific ISAR directors for failing to develop a long-term plan that prioritized regions on the basis of needed NGO development and/or environmental action. ISAR has had understandable difficulty keeping up with the new attitudes and values of multiple new CTOs during the course of its project. ISAR has been passed from CTO to CTO because of changes in Agency management authority and staff turnover. As a result ISAR has been forced to reintroduce and defend its program in the context of new and different approaches on an ongoing basis and has clearly become fatigued from this process. ISAR certainly needs to do a better job of measuring its own performance and that of grantees, but in ISAR's defense it is important to note that the range of data that ISAR would want to collect to make the best case for itself has changed with each CTO. Also, ISAR has become somewhat paralyzed in taking risks and forging new ground with its programs because of fear of readjustments in USAID priorities. In other words, it has sat on the fence in order protect its programs. The result is a less coherent program and a diminished sense of vision for its programs in the region.

That said, since ISAR's programs were effectively moved to the Office of Democratic Transitions, ISAR has benefited from greater stability in management, increased dialogue and understanding of its program goals, and increased interest in its work. Thanks to engagement by ISAR's current CTO, ISAR is now more aware than ever of its need to report on performance measures and increase networking with other USAID grantees.

► ***Effects of uncertainties and lapses in USAID funding have had a negative effect.*** Several grantees noted that there was a large turnover in staff in 1997–1998 and that ISAR's rather sudden closing of the Seeds of Democracy program has negatively affected both the sustainability of impacts under the program and professional qualifications of current staff. It is important that USAID work to ensure continuity in its regional environmental and democracy-building strategies and that ISAR recognize the tenuous nature of funding and not assume that additional funds will be forthcoming. In other words, ISAR should always plan as though the end of current funding will be the end of the project if it does not attract other resources. This will ensure that ISAR has a contingency plan and has identified alternative sources of support (training, technical assistance, etc.) for its clients.

F. Replicability of ISAR Programs Elements

This section is designed to complement the aggregate analysis provided above by answering specific questions raised by USAID in the Scope of Work and not covered elsewhere in this report.

Several elements of ISAR's programs should be considered for replication by other implementers. As other grant programs such as Counterpart move toward building local capacity for NGO support programs, develop partnerships and associations, and review grant proposals on the ground, ISAR's delegation of authority to local advisory boards and focus on feedback from all stakeholders should be

taken into consideration. While the advisory board mechanism is not perfect, ISAR's philosophy of putting local actors at the forefront of programs and soliciting feedback on a continuous basis should be reviewed by other implementers.

The Atyrau NGO Resource Center provides an excellent level of services and has truly served as a catalyst for citizen initiatives in the oblast. Its clientele has grown steadily, and demand for NGO services, especially use of computers, the Internet, e-mail, the library, and meeting space is beginning to outstrip the capital resources available at the center. ISAR's complete open-door policy, attention to customer service, and welcoming atmosphere should serve as the standards to which all resource centers should aspire.

The travel grant program has had an important impact on organizations' motivation to develop programs and to innovate. ISAR's insistence that organizations have a clear picture of how they will use the knowledge gained and contacts made to improve their programs should be a guide for creating demand-driven training and participation for other implementers and for ISAR's local training offerings. Other programs could also increase their domino effect by providing travel grants using ISAR's approach of insisting on a clear vision of how the conference will contribute to ongoing work and innovation by the recipient.

CEPI is a sound example of how a regional program can be built to benefit organizations from countries with very different local realities. More importantly, CEPI offers a model for using content to drive partnerships, increase citizen participation in individual regions, encourage organizations to share information, and resolve conflicts among citizens in the region.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Recommendations to USAID for Activities to Continue Funding

Following careful consideration of the findings, and in support of the conclusion already examined in this report, the evaluation team has identified several recommendations for USAID.

Recommendation: Continue to fund growth of the environmental movement through capacity building and grants to environmental NGOs.

Rationale:

Environmental NGOs are not supported under other activities. As USAID/CAR/ODT considers how to use limited available funding for civil society support programs in the future, the question of why the environmental movement should have a special program to the exclusion of other NGO subsectors is likely to arise. NGO subsectors continue to receive support through other USAID specialized or sector-focused activities, but these activities mostly exclude environmental NGOs by definition. (See *Background for description of USAID programs.*) While Counterpart serves a broad range of NGOs, its original focus was on social service NGOs, and it is now making community development a priority. OEEL has chosen to focus on a few narrow areas and only with NGOs that outwardly support proposed reforms in order to achieve impact with limited funds.

Support to environmental NGOs' links to USAID's Results Package. Work with environmental organizations is well suited to achieve results and facilitate USAID's change in definition of Strategic Objective 2.1 from "Increased, better-informed citizen participation in political and economic decision making" to "Strengthened democratic culture among citizens and target institutions." Environmental organizations fit the profile that USAID envisions for IR 2.1.1 because, in an ideal world, they "address

concrete local problems” and with training can “speak to the needs of citizens and government and engage popular support, awareness and commitment.”³⁶ For example, members of the Atyrau Resource Center were able to engage not only citizens but also government and business in its Earth Day cleanup project. More importantly, many environmental issues can be approached from various angles. They can bring in local support; require legislative change or commitment from administrative bodies; provide opportunities for advocacy and litigation; and serve a broad cross-section of the public regardless of class, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. In order to address environmental issues, organizations generally need to pursue advocacy or partnership with government and business earlier on in their evolution than social service organizations. While social service NGOs usually evolve over several years from providing services to the disadvantaged to recognizing a need to change laws or obtain government commitment, resolution of environmental issues usually requires that groups address an array of regulations and public policies. Finally, many environmental issues at the local level are non-threatening to local officials, and administrators often like to undertake environmental projects because they can show quick and obvious improvement in living conditions for their citizens.

There are clear links between transition to democratic society and resolution of environmental problems. Environmental problems are fundamentally based on how human society is organized. Accordingly, socio-political evolution is required for their resolution, but the necessary change does not come about quickly or easily. Social change occurs over a long period of time, through the gradual accumulation of myriad small changes.

Environmental NGOs are key actors in institutionalizing this process of social and environmental change. Their role is premised on their position in the real world, which enables them to debate and propose solutions and new social arrangements independent of political power, the state, or the logic of capital accumulation. By initiating free and open discussion, by mobilizing citizens and providing a competent, legitimate, authentic representation of their needs, environmental NGOs can act as catalysts for effective political demand for a transformation and help to bring about a democratic and ecologically sustainable society. Thus, ISAR may foster the capabilities of CAR environmental NGOs to communicate real world concerns into the public and private spheres.

Recommendation: Continue and expand support for democratic environmentally and socially sustainable development in all three Central Asia countries.

Rationale:

Environmental activism is one of the few areas where support at a local level can bring visible improvements that are quickly felt and appreciated by people and communities. With professionally designed small-scale environmental programs and projects that are carefully interwoven into national high-level environmental policy, strategy and programming “demagoguery,” much can be achieved on the ground from a democratic perspective too, particularly as these well-designed activities will be perceived as less threatening to the local, political, religious, clan, etc. establishment.

Support for environmental NGOs in the three Central Asia countries studied has not yet reached the point of diminishing returns. The environmental movement is still growing in each of the countries, and as multilateral and other foreign donors bring in money to support environmental improvements and institute small grant mechanisms, there will be increased need for qualified NGOs that have basic training and skills and are able to implement projects even on a small scale.

- In Kazakhstan, the environmental movement is producing strong NGO support organizations such as CASDIN and 21st Century. The movement is growing in the region, but several more

³⁶ See USAID Assistance Strategy for Central Asia, 2001-2005.

years of support will be necessary in order to ensure sustainability of impact made through ISAR's Periphery program. Because Kazakhstan is well ahead of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in terms of growth of the NGO sector and environmental organizations, it can serve as a testing ground to develop replicable models in other Central Asian countries.

- The environmental community in Uzbekistan is much smaller for a variety of reasons, and USAID support for the environmental movement will become more critical as unsuccessful environmental capacity programs such as the UNDP Aral Sea program come under greater scrutiny and face potential liquidation.
- In Turkmenistan, ISAR serves as an excellent balance to other implementers' difficult relationships with the national government.

Recommendation: Manage primary support to environmental organizations out of the USAID/CAR Office of Democratic Transition.

Rationale:

USAID/CAR/ODT has a comparative advantage over other offices in its ability to manage support for environmental NGOs. Because OEEI budgets have been reduced, it has narrowed its environmental focus to natural resources and has limited avenues for NGO participation primarily to promoting Natural Resource Management Project initiatives.

Because of the vast territory covered by ISAR's programs in Central Asia, the enormity of environmental problems, and external obstacles to sustainable long-term success of medium- and large-scale environmental interventions (e.g., political will, severity of environmental degradation, corruption, cross-border water conflicts, etc.), ISAR's limited funding is unlikely to produce environmental improvements of appropriate scale for inclusion in the OEEI portfolio. In fact, even some of the largest investors in environment in the region, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and UNDP, have had difficulty showing results of multi-million dollar projects. Civil society impact will always be more visible and measurable than environmental improvements. Even the "environmental impact" envisioned under ISAR's programs to date present less tangible environmental change than increases in citizen awareness and engagement around environmental issues.

Recommendation: Continue to fund ISAR to carry out this important work.

Rationale:

Recent on-the-ground management of ISAR's programs has provided better oversight and support to ISAR as well as more involvement on the part of USAID in implementation of ISAR programs. Additionally, management out of the CAR mission will facilitate greater collaboration and coordination of ISAR with other activities and will ensure that important synergies are not overlooked.

As a recognized and credible partner, ISAR should continue to receive support to strengthen environmental NGOs and develop civil society in CAR, but its role and the focus of its technical assistance and grant financing should be adjusted to reflect and ensure coherence with socio-political and environmental realities and priorities on the ground as well as consistency with new USAID/CAR Strategic Objectives, namely 1.5, 1.6, and 2.1.

ISAR is uniquely qualified and placed among USAID implementing partners to contribute successfully to USAID/CAR's revised Strategic Objective 2.1 because:

- As an organization, ISAR has a long-standing commitment to the environmental movement in the region. ISAR has been operating in the FSU since well before the U.S. Government made a commitment to assisting transitions to democracy and market economies. Likewise, ISAR's engagement with environmentalists and NGOs in Central Asia began as early as 1989. ISAR has demonstrated in other USAID regions (e.g., West NIS) that it is able and interested in sustaining activity once USAID has halted funding. ISAR's commitment to the FSU and Central Asia is not on the basis of project funding, but is rather the mission of ISAR. In short, ISAR may be one of the only American organizations that will remain in Central Asia when/if the republics graduate from USAID funding. If the U.S. Government properly supports the work of ISAR in the short to medium term, it will not only leave behind a network of sustainable environmental NGOs and a sustainable NGO Resource Center in Atyrau, it will also maintain a foothold in the region for the very interdependence between U.S. and indigenous organizations that contributes to U.S. policy interests in the long term.
- It has the network in place to tap into environmental expertise, NGO development infrastructure, and informational resources in the FSU and the United States. Central Asian environmental NGOs need qualified environmental expertise to obtain sustainable environmental impact, truly engage citizens in programs, and develop appropriate relationships with government and business. Currently, indigenous expertise in these areas is not available because of a simple lack of experience among environmentalists in the region, government monopolies on information and qualified human resources, and attraction of experts away from public sector organizations into industries such as oil and gas. ISAR already has highly successful programs in other regions (e.g., Russia) of the FSU and has excellent contacts with qualified trainers and environmental experts in both the United States and the FSU. By creatively combining existing regional resources with necessary American know-how, ISAR could create an extremely powerful and comprehensive training and technical assistance program at a lower cost than a new player in Central Asia, the FSU, or environmental activism would be able to achieve.
- ISAR's model in influencing the growth of a subsector of NGOs can serve as a demonstration project and learning opportunity to support future USAID civil society efforts in the region. USAID experience in more advanced emerging democracies of Eastern and Central Europe and the NIS has shown that generic support to NGOs can only take the Third Sector and civil society so far. Even when civil society is developing rapidly from below, there is an eventual point at which horizontal networks of NGOs must begin to build vertical alliances with organizations (public policy organizations, think tanks, professional associations, etc.) in order to influence political and economic processes. These networks are only effective when they address substantive topical areas with a degree of depth and professionalism that cannot be achieved by the NGO coming together as a whole. If properly nurtured, ISAR's horizontal network of grassroots environmental NGOs will be able to work with groups at the center to demonstrate how NGOs can influence government policy on an ongoing basis rather than on one-time issues. Counterpart's NGO support program is much broader and currently serves the function of generating enough new NGOs to create adequate density in the sector that a shakedown can occur to leave the best organizations in the long term. ISAR has, in some localities (e.g., Kazakhstan), supported a mushrooming and creation of a critical mass of environmental NGOs to now cause an ongoing weeding out process. With this critical mass in place, ISAR can move to the next step.
- ISAR's unique relationship with its grantees will make it difficult to achieve an easy handoff to Counterpart. ISAR and Counterpart have played very different roles within the NGO sector and have developed extremely different styles of working with NGOs. Perhaps because of long-term commitment to the region or limited funding, ISAR has taken a slower approach of encouraging

NGOs to grow but allowing them to make mistakes, suffer setbacks, and learn their own lessons. Counterpart has been under much heavier pressure to show immediate results and has therefore developed a strategy that requires NGOs to do certain things (e.g., register) in order to participate in training or receive grants.

- Counterpart's approach has brought organizations up to a common standard quickly; however, there is a danger that some of the gains made are artificial and won't "stick" once organizations no longer have to comply to get funds or support runs out. Obviously, this is not a tested theory, but it is important that USAID recognize that there are few tested approaches for NGO development in the post-communist world, and it would therefore be prudent not to put all eggs in one basket. Further, some organizations work better when asked to meet high standards immediately; other organizations work best in a supportive and forgiving environment.
- ISAR's governance, decision-making structure and grant-making process make it uniquely qualified and potentially highly effective in contributing to the new Strategic Objective 2.1. As previously stated, ISAR operates internally and in partnership with grantees and advisors in an extremely democratic and transparent fashion. Many of its newer grantees are already trying to model ISAR's behavior, and there is excellent potential to use ISAR as a case study for other implementers whose programs and operations should also embody the principles that USAID seeks to inject in Central Asian society.

B. Recommended Approaches to Advancing Environmental NGOs in Central Asia

This section addresses how USAID can best ensure sustainability of the impacts already achieved by ISAR's programs. Additionally, in response to the first draft of this document, USAID requested an analysis of how ISAR programs would contribute to USAID/CAR's new Strategic Objective 2.1, Strengthened democratic culture among citizens and target institutions, and suggestions about how some or all of ISAR activities and results might be covered by other implementers, namely ABA/CEELI and Counterpart.

Regardless of the level of funding that USAID decides to provide to ISAR, USAID and ISAR need to focus their attention on developing a realistic set of goals and expected results. Priority should be given to projects that are aimed at problems that can actually be resolved or issues that can actually be changed. Expected results in any future agreement should accurately mirror and support the strategic objectives of USAID and the intermediate results to which ISAR intends to contribute. ISAR's program is now quite mature, and USAID can and should expect clearer outcomes and a greater role in identifying best practices and desired approaches. Although the evaluation team stresses that ISAR should participate in the process, USAID should initiate the next round of funding through an RFA process. In other words, funding to ISAR in the future should not be on the basis of unsolicited proposals. Ideally, USAID would offer the opportunity for funding to ISAR on a noncompetitive basis in accordance with ISAR's unique capability, extensive experience, and consequent comparative advantage in the region. However, regardless of the mechanism, USAID should set the standards, identify the key elements of 2.1 to be addressed, and decide its level of substantial involvement BEFORE a proposal is submitted by ISAR.

Alternative I – Sufficient Funding Scenario

Because of ISAR's past successes and concrete areas in which funds could increase program impact dramatically, evaluators recommend that USAID increase funding to ISAR to implement nationwide grant programs in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Recommended elements to be included in design of the program

- *Provision of specialized resources through partnerships with American and other organizations to provide specialized information and training to groups of NGOs working on specific topic areas.*
- *Two to three tailored grant pools that target environmental groups at different stages of organizational development.* As part of this process, ISAR should conduct a thorough review of its own policies and other models of support for umbrella organizations, including funding of sub-organizations. ISAR should set specific standards and criteria for recognition of organizations as fiscal agents and of initiative groups as separate entities that are eligible to receive grants while operating under the “roof” of larger organization. Criteria might include a prohibition on multiple members of the same family receiving separate grants by forming initiative groups within their spouses’, parents’, or children’s umbrella organizations. Umbrella organizations should also be required to develop standard selection criteria and operational handbooks for work with initiative groups. Likewise, ISAR should develop clear standards for determining program eligibility of nonregistered organizations.
- *A comprehensive training program in order to achieve citizen participation and decision-making goals as well as ensure sustainable environmental impacts.* ISAR's program will not achieve its desired effect without a comprehensive training and technical assistance program aimed at developing NGO professionalism in areas such as outreach, advocacy, citizen activism, grassroots campaigning, attraction of local resources, environmental monitoring, and legal approaches to advocacy. Further, as most small NGOS will not be able to develop the necessary specialization to meet their entire advocacy needs, USAID or ISAR should focus on encouraging the development of consultants who can serve the environmental movement. These consultants might work through existing NGOs or with commercial organizations.
- *A new focus on building sustainable NGO governance in order to facilitate sustainability of NGO clients in the long term.* Repeat grantees should receive training in transparency, formation of independent boards of directors, conflicts of interest, etc. At some point, ISAR should begin to require that certain good governance standards be in place for an organization to continue to receive support. Likewise, selection criteria for advisory board members should include attention to sound policies and stability within their own organizations.
- *Sophisticated advocacy training.* To be effective, ISAR should help NGOs to weigh the merits of various strategies and tools, from advocacy to litigation, that these NGOs may wish to employ in order to gain desired environmental and policy results. NGOs must be able to analyze specific circumstances and select the tool that is most appropriate. In some cases, strategizing will show that more than one tool is needed to achieve specific environmental and democratic goals.
- *Training from qualified experts of other U.S. Government agencies.* For example, learning from Counterpart experience, ISAR and USAID may consider how to engage the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in supporting some training to and demonstration projects proposed by CAR NGOs.
- *A pool of matching funds that ISAR could tap to build partnerships with other donors with common interests and attract other donors to its programming.*

- *A clear statement of measurable (in quantitative and qualitative terms) environmental improvements and at what level (national, regional, and/or local) these improvements are expected to occur as result of the implementation of USAID-supported programs.*

[Notes: This may also help the EEI Office of USAID/CAR to identify small-scale pilot, community-based demonstration and replicable projects that are in line with the overall environmental support strategy and programs for CAR, and which can be implemented by selected experienced local NGOs, including in partnership with U.S. NGOs and companies.]

- *A long-term plan for working with more experienced NGOs.* Options include graduation from grant programs, thus releasing additional monies to emerging and inexperienced NGOs and community based groups; looking for projects proposed by experienced NGOs; and increasing requirements for locally generated matching funds from local governments, business, membership fees, local fundraising, and revenue generating activities such as consulting and social entrepreneurship, etc.
- *Consideration of existing and potential synergies with other USAID programs* (see box).

Box 1 Potential Synergies with other USAID Programs

>>Links with Counterpart and other implementers because ISAR grants are so small it is already serving as a supplier of qualified NGOs. For example, every Counterpart office has made grants to former ISAR grantees.

>>ISAR grantees' need for sound environmental law expertise fits well with ABA/CEELI's EPA program in Uzbekistan. Similarly, ISAR grantees might be tapped to provide test cases or internship opportunities for law clinics and students.

>>Counterpart NGO Resource Centers' and Soros NPO for NPO centers' interest in becoming sustainable, attracting fees for service and gaining experience in contracting out their services, fits well with ISAR's need for efficient training, technical assistance, consulting, monitoring, evaluation and follow up with local organizations. One the greatest challenges faced by all grant-makers in the region is the vast geographic territory of each country. ISAR could make excellent use of services currently provided by Counterpart and NPO for NPO centers by contracting with them for the provision of the above services. ISAR could provide training and set its own standards, improve the frequency of contact with clients and at the same time provide a safe environment for resource centers to gain service provision experience.

>>Internews could assist ISAR and its grantees in getting television exposure for their activities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and could also provide training to NGOs on relationships with press. ISAR grantees might also benefit from airing environmental and other news pieces or documentaries from Internews' Blue Sky and exchange programs.

>>Eurasia Foundation grantees could be tapped for assistance or collaboration on building volunteerism and a culture of philanthropy in order to support environmental NGOs in the long term.

>>Winrock might be able to assist ISAR's grantees in locating expertise on sustainable agriculture.

Recommended efforts to encourage NGOs to address issues of sustainability

- *Development of appropriate expertise to work on projects of multilateral and other foreign donors.* As noted, selected NGOs have or have acquired necessary professional expertise and experience that allow them to prepare and implement more complex, long-term, and expensive community-based environmental and outreach projects. It seems that these NGOs may be increasingly involved in projects that address nationwide or regional/global issues, including a) drafting and lobbying new environmental legislation, policies and programs, b) participating in EAs for multi-million dollar investment projects, c) procuring equipment for and conducting independent environmental monitoring in national or regional hot-spots, d) climate change and demonstration pilot energy efficiency, e) transboundary water or waste management, f) sustainable agriculture and new technologies, g) preserving biodiversity, and h) environmental education and information campaigns. They will have to seek to train and subcontract young and less-experienced environmental NGOs to ensure local outreach and to learn by implementing smaller project sub-components.

Both EPFs and REC have been specifically established and are authorized to provide grants to implement projects that address priority national and local problems, and to promote environmentally and socially sustainable development. Other foreign donors and/or USAID partners, like Counterpart, Eurasia, Winrock, ABA, etc., may be approached to contribute in accordance with their mandates and sector or regional priorities.

- *Matching and/or challenge grants to require and/or encourage grantees to attract other sources of funding.*
- *Social entrepreneurship, and income generating programs.* This option could be a follow-up on ISAR's own old proposal (see ISAR 17th Quarterly Report to USAID, April 30, 1997, pp. 50 – 53) to develop a loan (and income-generating) program to encourage appropriate and sustainable project formulation, enhance the quality and impact of projects, and enhance replicability of sustainable projects. This will also help to mitigate the situation when “many proposals are written solely for the sake of raising funds for the survival of a particular NGO and not for the purpose of addressing desperate needs” *Id.*, p. 50. Continuation of current ISAR CAR programs requires and the implementation of the above proposal will urgently demand higher professional and managerial expertise and experience on the part of ISAR staff as well as their better environmental knowledge and understanding of CAR environmental problems, etc.
- *Funding for organizations in capitals to provide training, technical assistance, and internships to emerging regional groups.*
- *Full funding of Internet and/or e-mail access for all participants even if such access will not be sustainable after completion of the program.* One of ISAR's most important opportunities is to build the horizontal network mentioned above and connect NGOs with critical information resources, distance learning opportunities and remote technical assistance. This can only be accomplished efficiently and cost-effectively if ISAR clients are online. The potential for nonsustainability of the network is outweighed by the short-term need to achieve as much as possible to develop a strong environmental movement over the course of the program.
- *Facilitation of a pool of funds (\$40,000-\$50,000 per year) to made available by OEEI to support demonstration projects in its focus areas.* OEEI has expressed concern that ISAR grantees are not

building positive relationships with government and/or supporting reforms deemed important by USAID. ISAR is concerned that its grantees not be forced into voicing opinions they do not hold. However, there is a middle ground, which is to offer NGOs the opportunity to conduct projects on a contract basis. This would allow organizations to get experience in fee-for-service work in a comparatively safe environment and would ensure that organizations maintain free choice in the types of endeavors they are willing to support. ISAR could serve as the intermediary, help to identify strong groups for OEEI, and/or administer contracts.

- *Expansion of funding for the Atyrau Resource Center to support an NGO incubator and a community philanthropy initiative (see Findings).*
- *Management consulting for the strongest of ISAR's clients.*

Alternative II – Limited Funding Scenario

If less than current funding is available, USAID should, at a minimum, seek ways to continue funding grants and training for ISAR grantees. It is likely that much of the progress made by ISAR in terms of working toward a network of organizations and sustainability of achieved results will be lost. However, USAID could continue to run a skeletal program of support by adding funds to Counterpart and ABA/CEELI while retaining an ISAR-provided environmental consultant to provide advanced training and technical assistance for which Counterpart does not have expertise. Ideally, a consultant of this nature would be hired for each country in which ISAR operates. The evaluation team would still urge USAID to continue funding for the Atyrau Resource Center and fold management of the CEPI program into the center under this scenario.

C. USAID Program Management in the Short Term

Begin to develop an exit strategy, tailored to regional needs. Regardless of what USAID/CAR may decide in relation to the scope and continuation of support for ISAR programs and particularly in view of the difficulties and pain that both ISAR and NGO beneficiaries experienced at times of uncertainty with a lack of USAID monies, it is diligent and prudent, on the part of both ISAR and USAID/CAR, to start thinking about and plan an “**exit strategy**.” While hesitation may be understandable, exit design and planning focuses on what will be left behind and encourages greater emphasis on sustainable results, i.e., the sustainability of NGOs and the sector itself. It will be instrumental in helping ISAR and USAID managers to sort through funding availability and priorities, and will guard against the uncertainties in the budgeting process. This will ease the decision of what to terminate and what to continue to support, and what will be left in the recipient CAR. There may be many other reasons to start considering various optimal alternative options and scenarios that are in line with U.S. policy objectives to support democratic transitions and environmental recovery in CAR.

Consider a Mission-wide solution to e-mail and Internet connectivity issues. USAID may want to consider contracts with Internet service providers to provide access at reduced rates to all USAID programs and grantees. Experience of some donors in Russia in working with providers to subsidize NGO e-mail and Internet accounts led to follow-on contracts with individual grantees after the end of the original contracts because providers were able to meet their fixed costs through blocks of NGO clients paying reduced rates. Further, if USAID were to provide equipment to ISPs, it could require provision of services until the full depreciation of the equipment — for as long as four to five years.

D. Recommendations to ISAR for Improvements to Current Programs

In completing current programs and regardless of whether USAID or another donor expands or diminishes funding for ISAR's activities, ISAR, in accordance with its financial capabilities, should seek improvements in the following areas to address the weaknesses identified in Section IV:

Program strategy and implementation

Recommendation: Seek to be more strategic in articulating and driving its civil society-building goals through its process.

Rationale

ISAR could be substantially more strategic about achieving the mission it has set for itself in Central Asia. Without adopting a top-down approach, dictating to grantees, or causing organizations to form for the sake of obtaining ISAR funding, ISAR can use its grant-making criteria, grant-making, targeted training and technical assistance to ensure that organizations focus on outreach to communities, development of lobbying and broader advocacy skills, and use of tested environmental models. For example, grant review criteria and application forms should be updated to include requirements for *detailed* plans for distributing materials, publicizing events, generating public awareness, and attracting citizen participation in projects. ISAR must back this up with training and technical assistance before and after disbursement of funds as most new organizations lack appropriate skills.

Programs should be adapted to individual country conditions. There is increasing stratification in the economic and political situations among the countries of Central Asia. Additionally, the environmental priorities in each country are changing too. A cookie cutter approach to grant programs and training is no longer workable, and ISAR must begin to set priorities for each country. This does not necessarily mean that ISAR needs to create wholly new, individualized infrastructures for each country. ISAR can simply state differing priorities for each country in a common RFA and offer different elements from a "menu" of training courses in each region.

Recommendation: Establish environmental performance indicators for ISAR's grant-funded projects.

Rationale:

The evaluation team feels that in order to raise the percentage of successfully implemented projects, ISAR should move quickly to ensure that all projects it grant-finances, as well as all of its activities, have *environmental performance indicators* (EPIs). EPIs are necessary for projects that have environmental improvements both as their primary and secondary objectives as well as for those projects whose activities may have direct or indirect impact on the environment.

EPIs will help to evaluate projects' impact on the environment, i.e., to ensure that they are having the desired positive impact, to monitor any possible adverse impacts, and to guard against unanticipated effects. Selection of EPIs must be closely linked to project objectives and environmental problems being addressed. Vague or overly broad objectives such as "protecting biodiversity or raising national public environmental awareness, or public environmental monitoring of Caspian Sea pollution," which are common for most of the projects proposed by CAR NGOs, are of little use in selecting EPIs (and may well indicate that the small grant project itself is not well thought through and will not achieve intended results and impacts).

Given the diversity of environmental problems and variety of national and local conditions in which they arise, no "correct or universal" set of EPIs exists that is applicable in all cases, nor is it practical to develop an exhaustive list of all possible indicators. EPIs should be custom-tailored to environmental

media or problems a project seeks to address, such as biodiversity, reduction of water-borne diseases, increased access to safe drinking water, forestry, environmental education, etc.

EPIs for ISAR grant-funded activities should: a) have direct relevance to project objectives, b) be limited in number, c) be clear and realistic, d) help to identify causal links, i.e., input-output-outcome-impact, e) be of high quality and reliable, f) have appropriate spatial and temporal scale, and g) help measure target environmental improvements against baseline conditions. EPIs will have to increase transparency, ownership, accountability, and sustainability of NGOs' projects.

Recommendation: Capitalize on existing in-country resources for monitoring, evaluation, training and technical assistance, especially to serve less-advanced organizations.

Rationale:

ISAR should take advantage of existing donor-funded resource centers to accomplish at least a portion of its monitoring and evaluation of projects in order to ensure regular monitoring and technical assistance to grantees. Counterpart, the Soros Foundation, the Eurasia Foundation, USIS, and others provide funding to NGO support organizations with which ISAR could contract to carry out monitoring and technical assistance in accordance with ISAR's mission, vision, strategy, and program guidelines. This approach would have added benefit of giving NGO support organizations experience in handling service contracts and adapting their existing services to donors' needs.

Recommendation: Coordinate activities more closely with other USAID implementers, especially ABA/CEELI, Counterpart, and Internews, and become more proactive in seeking out partnerships with other donors and implementers.

Rationale:

In all countries this will require a proactive approach to building collaborative relationships and identifying program synergies. In Turkmenistan, where there has been little or no contact with other implementers to date, the ISAR representative or administrative officer should attend Partners' Meetings, which are held on a regular basis at the USAID Mission in Ashgabad. Representatives from all USAID/CAR partners participate in these meetings and share their latest achievements and other news. Similarly, ISAR's reports to USAID should be more detailed in order to allow USAID to make constructive comments and follow up with ISAR activities.

As ISAR seeks out relationships, it should cast as wide a net as possible and meet with organizations whether or not their missions and visions obviously offer a close match. Even groups working in wholly different sectors may have connections to international donors or be able to offer expertise needed by ISAR and its grantees. For example, an accounting training program might be able to provide interns to help ISAR grantees file taxes, or a local government reform project might have positive relationships with a mayor or governor in a region where grantees are particularly struggling.

ISAR should encourage NGOs to focus on existing mechanisms for participation in environmental decision-making and protection of citizens' rights.

As all CAR governments legally require preparation of environmental impact assessment (EIA) and governmental environmental assessment reviews (state ecological expertise - SEE) with mandatory public participation for all development projects as well as for public environmental assessment, both USAID and ISAR may wish to consider developing a technical assistance and grant package to support public participation in EIA/SEE. This will help ensure public participation in the design, planning, and decision-

making process as well as address in a consistent and transparent fashion many community-based economic, social, and environmental concerns.³⁷

Recommendation: Consider scaling-up the dollar grant amount for increasingly complex community-based environmental projects developed by credible and experienced NGOs with proven track records.

Rationale:

ISAR grants helped to sustain and strengthen a number of environmental NGOs that are now capable of developing and implementing more complex and expensive environmental community-based projects with well-defined performance indicators and sustainable outcomes, and that plan and conduct lobbying, outreach, and education projects for broader audiences. Scaling-up projects may lead to growth in size and coverage of NGOs, NGOs cooperating with each other, NGOs assuming catalytic roles to help others to replicate and diffuse innovations, transferring successful approaches to emerging NGOs, etc. For this purpose ISAR can also try “nested management,” where experienced, “higher tier” local NGOs implement projects through smaller NGOs or CSOs. This approach may be particularly successful in water and agricultural management innovative projects.

Recommendation: Begin to build a growth strategy and develop criteria for eligibility and selection of clients for all services offered by the Atyrau NGO Resource Center.

Rationale:

ARC staff say that any member of the public is welcome to use the center’s resources but that ongoing technical assistance, access to training, and grants are only available to “real” initiative groups and organizations. This seems to make sense, especially given that the center’s services are in greater and greater demand. However, there are no clear criteria for determining what a “real” group is. Right now, the evaluation seems to be based more on instinct than on policy, strategy, priorities, development theory, or the law. Additionally, demand for use of the center’s library area, other space, and equipment is outstripping the center’s capital and space resources. Therefore, it is imperative that the center begins to develop priorities or a strategy for meeting the ever-increasing demand. Some clients would be ready to graduate from the center if they were able to obtain grant funding for space and computer equipment from other sources. Another possibility might be to seek funding from USAID, local government, corporate sponsors, or other international donors to create an NGO incubator that would provide small offices and basic networked equipment to organizations while they create strategies to fund their activities and graduate from the incubator. Finally, the center might want to charge nominal fees or barter for service with non-NGO clients such as students and business people. Fees could be used to support the center’s current budget, expanded center services, or a grant pool to fund NGOs’ initial costs in purchasing

³⁷ Environmental assessment (EA) is an internationally recognized formal and systematic process of ensuring environmental and social sustainability of policies, programs, and projects. By consistently applying various analytical tools, EA aims to predict environmental and social consequences of proposed actions and their alternatives, and provides for their economic and financial evaluation and comparison. EA elaborates appropriate measures to avoid, prevent, minimize, mitigate, or compensate for identified adverse impacts and consequences, and seeks to enhance positive effects by improving selection, planning, design, siting, and ultimately decision-making related to a particular action. More importantly, EA requires enlightened public participation of local groups and communities, which may be affected by the implementation of the selected program or project option, at various stages of design and planning processes.

Essentially, the advantages of both Conventions should be utilized in a coherent fashion, but not at the expense of one or another. In both cases, ISAR could help to tap into the wealth of experience of U.S.-based NGOs that have experience both with EA and openness of information. Complementarity with programs offered by ABA/CEEILI should be explored in a greater detail as should opportunities that may exist under programs funded through the USAID Energy and Environment Office. ISAR experience with NGOs will also be beneficial to an EA process, which obviously falls under EEI.

equipment or obtaining space to graduate from the center. Barter services requested might include administrative, fundraising, and activity support for clients or for the center itself.

Recommendation: Continue funding in Turkmenistan using creative solutions.

Rationale:

The situation in Turkmenistan is extremely complex and difficult for all foreign donors to navigate. USAID and ISAR will need to remain flexible and responsive to changes in order to capitalize on opportunities and minimize obstacles. For ISAR, achieving this flexibility and responsiveness will require a stepped-up effort to coordinate with other donors and USAID implementers to take advantage of their capacities and build on lessons learned. For example, ISAR might seek out shelter under the registration of another donor such as the Eurasia Foundation or use Counterpart's on-the-ground presence to deliver funds to grantees. Additionally, ISAR will have to plan advisory board committee dates much further in advance than has been its practice to date if visas are to be obtained by Turkmen participants.

Outreach, Networking, Information and Communications

Recommendation: ISAR should develop a comprehensive "communication" plan to ensure that environmental and democratic messages are regularly transmitted and heard in Central Asia.

Rationale:

In a democratic society, mass media communication is one of the most powerful tools for an NGO to get its messages out. In any democratic society, people hold the power to shape public policy, and, at the same time, people are in turn influenced by what they see, hear, and read. Thus, mass media plays a very important role in shaping and influencing open public debate and decision-making, changing public opinion, and changing and/or improving environmental policy at all levels of government as well as behavior of the private sector.

ISAR should have a strategic, proactive mass communication plan for CAR NGOs, which should be integrated into ISAR's own strategic planning, that keeps environmental issues before the public and helps influence public leadership on environmental matters. ISAR should help local NGOs to develop positive relationships with mass media and maintain the highest professional standards in their communications. ISAR may wish to start thinking about developing its own image in CAR that will help the public to readily recognize ISAR and identify it with resolution of environmental issues. ISAR should decide on two or three essential messages that will form the core of its communication efforts in general and each CAR in particular. To get its messages out, ISAR may think about tapping into capabilities of other USAID partners active in the region, such as Internews.

Proactive environmental outreach not only plants the "seeds" of environmental thinking and leadership, it also nurtures these seeds and encourages them to grow and bear fruit. ISAR should realize that successful environmental outreach does not happen simply by virtue of the cause. It must be strategically planned and executed as part of the overall organizational plan for CAR. Environmental outreach should grow from organizational goals and environmental and democratic agendas and be very sensitive to the interests of NGOs and people who live within certain territories, watersheds, and communities. But rallying people would not be enough; ISAR and local NGOs should truly and more extensively engage local communities.

Recommendation: ISAR must create a comprehensive database of its grantees, including core ones, for each program and country.

Rationale:

ISAR must comply with its commitment under the CA to establish a CAR environmental NGOs database. This will allow all interested parties to timely monitor and evaluate the development of the environmental movement and civil society in the region. The Assessment Team Checklist, NGO Questionnaire, and Interview Questions provided in Annexes 2, 3, and 4 might serve as a good starting point for creating this environmental NGO database. Guidance and advice should be expeditiously sought from USAID/CAR and USAID/Washington on how to fine-tune and focus this database to enable it to serve its intended purposes. Counterpart International must be contacted, too, to ensure consistency and complementarity and to avoid any overlaps and duplication.

Program Administration

Recommendation: Reconsider country-level staffing needs.

Rationale:

In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, ISAR should consider hiring a representative without close ties to the environmental sector. This approach would allow ISAR to regain its reputation for objectivity. Further, the new representative should be fulltime and not represent any other foreign donor. ISAR should look for an individual with excellent administrative and presentation skills. ISAR might also consider representation agreements with existing USAID programs or other implementers for the distribution of information, provision of grant-writing assistance, and collection of proposals (see below).

Recommendation: Reconsider current pay scales.

Rationale:

Programmatically, ISAR simply cannot afford to have long periods without a director in either the Almaty or Atyrau office. In addition, ISAR needs to be able to compete with other international development organizations in attracting and retaining the best possible talent. Until ISAR makes this leap, it will continue to be almost impossible to attract directors who combine knowledge about the environment, cross-cultural management skills, and a background in NGO development.

Recommendation: Create an organization-wide learning program to share ISAR successes and learn from other organizations' effective models.

Rationale:

ISAR Central Asia could benefit greatly from exposure to its peers, policies, and procedures in other ISAR offices in the region. For example, ISAR Ukraine has developed a superb database that tracks developmental progress and allows for ongoing program evaluation. Similarly, since ARC operates independently from the Almaty office and has a slightly different focus, it has gleaned lessons that may be relevant to ISAR Almaty, such as inclusion of non-environmental NGO representatives on its review boards. These members were included in order to ensure qualified analysis of non-environmental projects, but their input into review of outreach and information distribution plans proved to be extremely valuable for environmental projects. This approach should at least be explored as an option for other ISAR grant programs, but a formal process of sharing experiences must be put into place to ensure that staff make time to learn from one another.

ISAR NGOs' PROJECTS SUCCESS STORIES

Introduction

The following success stories were identified by the evaluation team through a combination of the review of ISAR quarterly reports, grant files, and newsletters; roundtable discussions with ISAR clients and other NGOs; interviews with grantees, other donors, advisory board members, ISAR staff, and program beneficiaries; and review of written questionnaires, which were completed by approximately 80 percent of interviewees and roundtable participants. Additionally, project impacts were confirmed through inquiries to other local and regional NGOs, media coverage, and awareness of governmental officials.

Successes of the ISAR program cover a broad spectrum of types of NGOs, thematic focus, and activities/mechanisms. The evaluation team reviewed “success stories” project files in ISAR offices. In the field, the team held NGO roundtables and conducted follow-up in-depth interviews with each grantee separately. The stories below do not represent an exhaustive list of grantee and client successes. In fact, evaluators discovered multiple successful projects, including activities aimed at environmental education and awareness, bio-diversity preservation, water management and environmental protection, NGO capacity building, etc. The projects and programs below were chosen to represent a cross-section of ISAR grantees and approaches.

Particular attention has been paid to program elements that contribute to the results set forth in ISAR’s proposals and specific areas presented to the evaluation team for review in the Scope of Work. These include media coverage, government involvement or reaction, public awareness and participation, environmental impact, and NGO outreach.

Project name:	<i>Aral Crisis – for Safe Childhood</i>
Grantee:	Center “Persent,”* Nukus, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan
Total amount:	\$100.00 discretionary transportation grant and \$3,000.00 (“Seeds of Democracy”) (followed by \$18,000.00 “Cooperative Grant”)
Implementation:	March 1995 – January 1996
Goal:	To facilitate understanding of and responsible attitude of women and youth toward health and environmental issues.
Objectives:	1) Develop methodology of and training materials for environmental education, 2) conduct theoretical and practical environmental training for middle and senior school students, 3) publish environmental brochures and pamphlets for the youth, and 4) establish a club under “Persent” where youth can regularly meet and receive training under the “Safe Childhood” program.

Program Summary

The first ISAR discretionary transportation grant allowed Ms. Oral Atanijazova, the leader of *Persent*, to participate in an environmental conference, which exposed her to environmental and health relationships and helped her to better understand that youth is the future of the nation. Participation in the conference was followed by the grant that fostered environmental awareness and education in the Aral Sea crisis zone. Under this grant, computer, e-mail access, and training were provided, and a regular environmental publication was started. An environmental education center and NGO, “Shagala,” was established that presents environmental education programs attended by schoolchildren and teachers from many local schools. (These activities were supported with an ISAR US\$1,841.00 grant.) In the absence of official textbooks, developed training materials were used for extracurricular activities in the city. All activities were widely covered in the local press and attracted the attention of local authorities.

Experience gained during grant project implementation led *Persent* to prepare and implement, together with ECOLOGIA, Pennsylvania, US, an \$18,000.00 cooperative grant project aimed at establishing an independent water quality monitoring program to provide the population with independent data on the state of drinking water. Grant money was used to purchase monitoring equipment used by schoolchildren and university students to monitor water quality in the Aral Sea basin. A cooperative effort was undertaken together with the local state environmental authority to determine sources of drinking water pollution.

The ISAR discretionary grant gave a strong boost to *Persent* development and continuous project work in the environmental field, and to outreach to communities and other donors.

An outstanding effort by Ms. Atanijazova received worldwide recognition, which culminated in her receiving a prestigious 2000 Goldman Award for environmental achievement.

Media interest – The local press regularly covers activities of *Persent* and other NGOs created under its umbrella.

Public awareness and participation – The public is clearly aware of *Persent*, as is evident from its exponential growth as well as from increased public participation of youth and the local population in a variety of activities in health and environmental areas sponsored by this NGO.

Relations with government – Local authorities increased their efforts to address pressing environmental problems, particularly by attempting to provide access to clean water and by ensuring more consistent enforcement of health and environmental legislation. Ms. Atanijazova has been recently appointed the Rector of Karakalpakstan Republican Medical University in Nukus.

Environmental impact – *Persent* continues to provide independent health services through its own hospital, sponsors construction of water pipes, and monitors environmental pollution, particularly water, soil, and food contamination

Outreach to other NGOs – In addition to spearheading the emergence of a number of new NGOs, *Persent* provides facilities and services to local NGOs searching for NGOs inside and outside Karakalpakstan working to resolve similar problems.

Impact

The organization has significantly raised awareness of the relationships between environmental pollution and population health; has led to many activities aimed at solving environmental problems and improving public health through education and providing alternative, cheap medical services to women and youth; and continues lobbying local executive and legislative bodies to increase public spending on environment and health and enforce existing laws. *Persent* now provides micro-credit to farmers.

* *Persent* was created in 1990 by Ms. Oral Atanijazova and was officially registered in 1992; active work started in 1995. Staff grew from two people in 1993-1995 to over 80 in 2001. *Persent* has a Founder's Board and Coordination Council, members of which are elected. Source of financing: local (20%) – income from own hospital, consulting fees, membership fees, volunteers' help, donations; foreign (80%) – ISAR/USAID, Counterpart/USAID, Eurasia/USAID, etc.

Project name:	“Clean River”
Grantee:	“Atamakan,”* Khalkabad, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan
Total amount:	\$350 (“Pereferia”)
Implementation:	June – August 2000
Goal and objective:	To prevent a typhoid outbreak by provision of clean drinking water to community No. 1 of Khalkabad.

Program Summary

The city of Khalkabad had an outbreak of typhoid in 1964. Since that time, the city has been subject to numerous health problems due to lack of a reliable drinking water supply.

While the grant financed purchase of construction materials, the local community volunteered in the construction of a 212-meters-long water-well, a water-pipe, and a 40-cubic-meter storage facility that ensured reliable water supply to about 5,000 people.

Media interest – Local and republican press covered the preparation and implementation of the project.

Public awareness and participation – In addition to the support of the local community, the project stimulated growing interest from other communities in the region and Karakalpakstan. Based on the project success, other communities started collecting money to build water storage facilities.

Relations with government – Local authorities supported the initiative of *Atamakan* and started replicating the project approach in other communities.

Environmental impact – Provision of clean drinking water, together with hygiene training, limited opportunities for disease outburst.

Outreach to other NGOs – A number of initiative groups emerged in other communities with similar problems; *Atamakan* began dissemination action and “lessons learned” program from other NGOs, like Farmer’s Center and Union for Defense of Aral Sea and Amur-Darya (UDASA); the next project is a joint effort with a local school to establish an environmental museum.

Impact

Atamakan significantly increased the reliable clean water supply to a local community; stimulated similar initiatives by other neighboring communities; raised environmental awareness and, in the lack of state support, public initiative to solve existing community problems through own concerted efforts; and increased pressure on the local authorities to contribute to managing local water, sanitation, health, and environmental problems.

* *Atamakan* was created and registered in October 1998; Founder’s Board – 2 people, active members – 12, active volunteers – 90; Annual Meetings is the highest authority; two regular staff. Source of financing: ISAR/USAID and Counterpart/USAID; annual budget – only grant financing.

Project name:	“Garbage at Work”
Grantee:	Farmer’s Center,* Nukus, Karakalpakstan
Total amount:	\$2,210 (“Pereferia”)
Implementation:	March 2000 – September 2001
Goal:	To clean the community by collecting, separating, and composting garbage food products wastes, and by greening of the community.
Objectives:	1) Educate the community in the need for waste minimization and management, 2) prepare the space and containers for garbage collection and its transportation to a specially selected site for composting, 3) clean the community and purchase and plant trees, and 4) shoot a film for promotion of the initiative to other communities.

Program Summary

In the absence of centralized municipal efforts, garbage and food waste is dumped right in the center of many communities in Nukus, causing potential for the spread of diseases and creating a negative emotional atmosphere. Farmer’s Center initiated discussion with one of the communities to explain and implement the above pilot project. Citizens were trained on the proposed technology to collect and separate waste in order to prepare compost that would later be used during tree planting. Garbage containers were procured and the site was properly prepared. Continuous monitoring of garbage and waste separation and storage was implemented. Educational pamphlets were printed and distributed among the citizens of the community. In addition, a local staff was hired to further explain garbage collection procedures, monitor timely transportation of waste to a selected dumpsite, and guard against unsanctioned dumping.

Though it may be early to judge the overall success, sustainability, and replicability of the project, it is obvious that it has been supported by the community and has a potential for implementation on a larger scale, particularly when the state almost completely discontinued this municipal service.

Media interest – The project is covered in local media and in local and Russian languages.

Public awareness and participation – About 900 people are involved; the project activities raised community awareness of low-cost garbage and waste management practices and the role the community can play in mitigating local problems.

Relations with government – Local authorities recognize the role communities can play in solving their own problems and they experienced increased pressure from communities to timely address the needs of the local population.

Environmental impact – A visible improvement occurred in the overall quality of environmental and sanitary-epidemiological conditions.

Outreach to other NGOs – Farmer’s Center looked to other local and regional NGOs for experience and expertise. The Center works with Winrok, Soros, and Counterpart on bio-technologies and mini-agriculture and initiated a project to build a greenhouse and a garden to supply an orphanage with vegetables and fruits.

Impact

People became aware of environmental problems and realized that their own efforts, with minimum state support, can lead to solving them; other communities in the city became interested in the ongoing effort to solve municipal waste problems through mobilization of the local population; Karakalpakstan Parliament, municipal authorities, and association of farmers are considering opportunities to spread this initiative republic-wide.

* Farmer’s Center was created in 1996 and officially registered in February 1997. Board of Directors is elected for one year from the members of the NGO, which has six staff and four volunteers. Source of finance: local – donations and volunteers’ support, and foreign – ISAR/USAID. Annual budget: US\$1,200.00

Project name:	"Use of Soy in Turkmenistan"
Grantee:	Association "Kopetdag"* under CATENA, Ashgabad, Turkmenistan
Total amount:	\$2,460.00 ("Seeds of Democracy")
Implementation:	September 1996 – June 1997
Goal:	By introducing new agricultural plants to provide an alternative source for feeding cattle at private farms, to reduce overgrazing in nature protected areas, to preserve biodiversity, and to reduce the threat of desertification.
Objectives:	1) Inform local population of the threat of desertification to the sustainability of local communities and local biodiversity, 2) spread knowledge about environmental consequences of overgrazing and means to reduce negative impacts through dissemination of information pamphlets in Turkmen and Russian languages, 3) stimulate local environmental protection by implementing demonstration high-protein plants projects on private land plots, and 4) ensure sustainable use of new practices.

Program Summary

Kopetdag conducted express polls to identify representatives of local communities who might be interested to participate in the project initiative, and to determine local attitudes toward environmentally sustainable agricultural production, as well as to determine major environmental problems caused by overgrazing. *Kopetdag* provided information about and comprehensive training on using new crops and applicable technologies, and explained the ways and means to reduce negative environmental impacts. After the selected group of farmers were trained, seeds of various local ("Karakum") and foreign (mainly US) soy brands were distributed for planting and production of high-protein feedstock for cattle. In addition, farmers were introduced to various meals (about 400) that can be produced from soy for daily consumption and for sale.

Media interest – Local media published numerous articles on the project, in both Turkmen and Russian languages.

Public awareness and participation – The local population was greatly interested and actively participated in the implementation of the project. In addition to 60 to 80 initial participants, villagers from an additional five local communities started planting soy for feeding animals and personal consumption; effectiveness was greatly increased by providing easy-to-read and follow-up instruction materials in Russian and Turkmen languages.

Relations with government – The project received full support from local authorities as it helped to achieve goals of self-sustainable agricultural production envisioned in the statewide agricultural program.

Environmental impact – The introduction of new crops helped to reduce overgrazing and pressure on land in protected areas and to protect local bio-diversity, and, subsequently, may help to slow the speed of desertification due to loss of grass cover and unstable sands.

Outreach to other NGOs – *Kopetdag* began cooperating with other NGOs under the CATENA umbrella, including "Noev Kovcheg" and "Bereket," on saving bio-diversity and establishing a data-bank of indigenous flora species; the NGO was also exposed to Counterpart, and began working with other donors.

Impact

Since 1997, local communities continue to plant soy and use it for intended purposes; farmers provide seeds to other interested communities free of charge.

* *Kopetdag* was established in 1996, is not officially registered, and operates under the umbrella of CATENA.

Project name:	“Unpublished Books”
Grantee:	Public Philanthropy Fund of Technical Support of CAR NGOs “XXI Century,”** Almaty, Kazakhstan
Total amount:	\$3,000.00 (“Seeds of Democracy”)
Implementation:	April – May 1997
Goal:	To publish two books — <i>Fates of Naryn</i> and <i>They Should not Disappear</i> .
Objective:	By publishing these books by M.I. Marikovsky, to fill the gap in environmental literature.

Program Summary

Due to lack of funding, the state has almost discontinued publication of popular and professional environmental literature and textbooks for schools and higher education institutions.

In the early days of its creation, *XXI Century* decided to focus on supporting environmental education and information dissemination, and selected these two books for printing. Five hundred copies were distributed for free to various schools in Almaty, other educational institutions, and NGOs.

An ISAR grant supported *XXI Century* in its early initiative, and helped to create the only financially stable publishing house that serves primarily national and CAR environmental NGOs, the private sector, and selected donors active in the country.

Media interest – An independent small-scale publishing house was created that prints periodicals of NGOs at fair rates.

Public awareness and participation – Many NGOs quickly learned of opportunities provided by *XXI Century*, and the general public and youth gained a new source of environmental information.

Relations with government – The government recognizes the importance of the *XXI Century* mission and a trilateral memorandum on cooperation was signed by the Parliament, the Ministry of Environment, and “Eco-forum.”

Environmental impact– Newly created environmental NGOs had an opportunity to receive low-cost environmental publications and disseminate their own publications.

Outreach to other NGOs – *XXI Century* became particularly supportive of environmental and human rights causes, served as a networking “hub” for environmental NGOs, and became one of the founding members of the nationwide “Eco-forum,” involving about 120 NGOs.

Impact

For several years, *XXI Century* was the only independent publishing house serving exclusively the NGO community. Its portfolio has steadily increased from 15 orders in 1996 to over 80 orders from local and CAR NGOs and the donor community. The NGO facilitated environmental education, supported independent press, and enhanced the information dissemination capabilities of many NGOs in the region; similar NGO “publication” projects have been replicated in other cities of Kazakhstan, including Astana and Karaganda, and in Tajikistan. ISAR helped in NGOs’ development, which is like “mountain climbing, when the first to climb secures the way for those behind him.”**

**XXI Century* was created in 1995, based on the idea of several NGOs to start a “publication project” to ensure continuous printing of environmental literature. This NGO was officially registered in September 1996, and “Green Salvation” was one of its founders. Today, *XXI Century* has about nine regular staff and over 15 volunteers, and itself has become one of the initiators of an association of Kazakhstan NGOs in a national “Eco-forum.” Sources of financing: local – publishing income (pay all applicable taxes) and consulting, donations and volunteer work; foreign – ISAR/USAID, Counterpart/USAID, USIS, American Legal Consortium/USIAD, Soros/Kazakhstan, etc.

** Alexander Polyakov, *XXI Century* Leader and Co-Chairman of the 2nd “Eco-forum,” personal interview, Almaty, Kazakhstan, May 24, 2001.

Project name:	“Creation of Ecological and Socio-historical Museum”
Grantee:	Initiative “Rodnik,”* Yunus-Abad district of Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Total amount:	\$500.00 (discretionary grant)
Implementation:	December 2000 – June 2001
Goal:	To create a museum as a center for youth environmental and socio-historical education.
Objectives:	1) Creation of six displays on: environmental protection, history of irrigation in Uzbekistan, industry and environment, saving of Aral Sea – as global problem, development of urban settlements in Uzbekistan, and protection of human health; 2) develop methodologies of using the museum for environmental education of schoolchildren and the local population; and 3) use the museum as a center for environmental education and information dissemination for the local population and NGOs.

Program Summary

Rodnik is the first and only ecological museum in Tashkent, which has a population of close to two million people. Schoolchildren and their parents, the local population, and professionals from a state museum participated in collecting and systematizing objects and materials for display. Regular educational, training, and information dissemination classes, sessions, and meetings are held for various beneficiary groups. Schoolchildren lead tours for visitors from Tashkent and other cities.

Media interest – Republican and local press published a series of articles about the museum; radio interviews were conducted with Ms. Galina Yudina, the leader of *Rodnik*, and an environmental seminar was shown on the republican TV channel.

Public awareness and participation – The local population is regularly exposed to professional interpretations of causes and solutions of existing national and local environmental problems, and the need for environmental protection and sustainable development with a focus on poverty reduction.

Relations with government – National authorities, including the Ministries of Environment and Education, the Hydro-meteorological and Environmental Monitoring Service, and a number of nature protected areas, regularly provide assistance and information to the museum; selected multilateral institutions shared environmental publications and helped to produce selected pamphlets for the museum. The National Academy of Teaching and Science analyzed the experience of the museum and suggested that it be used as a model.

Environmental activities – The museum became a methodological center for environmental education and information dissemination; it spearheads environmental and local community “clean-up” activities related to celebrations of Earth Days; children and school graduates regularly volunteer in national botanic gardens and the Zoo as well as campaign against burning of leaves in autumn, which significantly increases air pollution.

Outreach to other NGOs – The museum became a place where NGOs and teachers from city and rural schools meet on a regular basis.

Impact

The local population became better aware of environmental problems. Community members also recognized that their own activities and/or inaction caused environmental degradation. They changed their attitude from a common belief that nothing could be changed to recognizing that by implementing small activities and projects, they change their life. Local and national educational authorities slowly recognized the potential of environmental educational programs offered by the museum, and took steps to spread this experience to other regions, and integrate some of the approaches into a national environmental educational program that was under preparation.

* Ms. Galina Yudina established *Rodnik* at school No 88 in 1995. Since then, many graduates, their parents and representatives of local community participated in activities initiated by *Rodnik*.

Project name:	“Youth Environmental Inspection”
Grantee:	School Ecological Club “Rodnichok,”* Ak-kavak settlement in the Kibrai district of Tashkent province, Uzbekistan
Total amount:	\$3,000.00 (“Pereferia”)
Implementation:	December 2000 – December 2001
Goal:	To improve environmental awareness and education through practical actions.
Objectives:	1) In view of the perceived abundance of gas in the country, expose the local population to the need to save energy as well as water, which is in great shortage; 2) ensure the sanitary-epidemiological cleanness of local communities; 3) introduce sustainable agricultural practices to people living in private houses; 4) conduct public youth expertise of preservation of local flora and fauna genetic fund and 5) introduce the local population to climate change issues.

Program Summary

Schoolchildren work with people living both in high-rise apartment buildings and in private houses, explaining the need to save energy and water, keep buildings and streets clean from garbage and waste, and use sustainable agricultural practices on private plots of land. A contest was held to select the building that best saves energy and water and is clean. During the contest, glass was installed in many windows, lights were turned off during the day, and garbage was collected and disposed at a municipal dump. Schoolchildren monitored the process and selected winners. The winners received buckets and brooms, and tea with cake was served to the local community. In addition to full support by locals, the contest caused great interest on the part of neighboring communities, which decided to introduce similar initiatives in their neighborhoods, as well as on the part of local authorities, which supported energy- and water-saving activities. Children also prepared and delivered presentations on sustainable agriculture and climate change and were invited to lecture in many other schools of the district and the capital.

Media interest – Activities are regularly covered in the local newspaper, and an article was published in the national press.

Public awareness and participation – In addition to learning of their own environmental impacts, the population learned that they can change things and solve problems themselves; that by constantly doing small things they can change life for the better; and that mentality cannot be changed overnight and by one or two actions — it requires continuous activity.

Relations with government – The government learned about NGOs’ capabilities to help address community-based environmental problems.

Environmental impact – While not easily measured, through this activity participants became accustomed to turning off lights and water facets –thus saving water and energy–keeping their doorways and streets clean and collecting garbage and waste.

Outreach to other NGOs – *Rodnichok* first started sharing its experience with other local schools communities, and only recently, became aware of other NGOs engaged in similar activities and began outreaching to and sharing knowledge and experience with them.

Impact

These small actions helped to solve minor problems, but at the same time increased the sense of community.

* *Rodnichok* was established in 1998; active work started in 2000.

Project name:	"Participation in a Regional Conference on Bio-diversity and Eco-tourism"
Grantee:	Center of Public Development "Bars,"* Leninogorsk, Kazakhstan
Total amount:	\$280.00 travel grant
Implementation:	September – October 2000
Goal:	To participate in a regional conference on experience with bio-diversity preservation, environmental protection, and eco-tourism in the Baikal region.
Objectives:	

Program Summary

Leninogorsk, one of most polluted areas in Kazakhstan, is also a place of vast bio-diversity resources and picturesque scenery. Participation in the conference helped *Bars* to learn from the experience of and build partnerships with Russian environmental NGOs working in the field of toxic waste management, environmental protection, bio-diversity preservation, and eco-tourism.

Media interest – Local press regular covers the activities of *Bars*.

Public awareness and participation – In addition to *Bars* leaders gaining more experience and knowledge of environmental problems and available solutions, the local population is becoming increasingly aware of and engaged in environmental work.

Relations with government – Local authorities and management of a number of local nature protected areas support and actively cooperate with this NGO.

Environmental impact – *Bars*, in cooperation with interested parties and local beneficiaries, is developing an eco-tourism project aimed at preserving local bio-diversity and financial sustainability of protected areas, establishing a national park, and conducting focused environmental training.

Outreach to other NGOs – ISAR's grant gave a tremendous boost to local, regional, and international NGOs' cooperation with *Bars*, work on joint projects, and cooperative training.

Impact

The project has helped to build capacity of emerging local NGOs, raise awareness among the local population and authorities of the need to protect and preserve bio-diversity as a source of sustainable development; local communities are involved in many activities "sponsored" by *Bars*.

* *Bars* was created in 1996 and officially registered in 1997. Board of Directors, directors and heads of programs; staff has grown from three to eight people today, and about 40 volunteers working on specific tasks and projects. Sources of finance: local – consulting services and computer training, donations, volunteers' help, Oblast Environmental Protection Fund, personal contributions; foreign – ISAR/USAID, GEF small grants, etc. Annual budget – approximately US\$25,000.00, mainly from donor sources.

Project name:	“Clean Air – Do Not Burn Leaves”
Grantee:	“Yashil”* under CATENA
Total amount:	\$994.00 (“Seeds of Democracy”) followed by other project grants (under CASPI programs a US\$4,000.00 grant for “Eco-school and Camp Khazar”), implemented jointly with other Turkmenistan NGOs, including “Young Geologist,” “Gunorta,” and “Young Gepards (“Cheetahs”), and with “JAN” to hold conferences and celebrate Earth Days.
Implementation:	September – November 1996
Goal:	To improve air quality in the city by reducing the amount of dried leaves burnt in the streets.
Objectives:	1) Conduct, with schoolchildren (from 6th – 10th grades from six schools) participation, a public awareness campaign on the negative impacts of leaf burning; 2) prepare educational pamphlets and leaf-letters, and distribute them in local communities; 3) establish an “environmental patrol” of schoolchildren groups to monitor compliance and a “hot-line” to report violations; and 4) clean streets in the center of the capital.

Program Summary

Yashil established volunteer “environmental patrol” groups of schoolchildren from various Ashgabad schools who, together with their parents, explained the negative impacts of leaf burning on air quality, and monitored compliance. Posters and flyers were displayed throughout the city. Parents supported their children in this activity. About 200 fires were put down, and violators were invited to participate in educational training.

Media interest – Press, radio, and TV regularly covered this initiative.

Public awareness and participation – The response from the general population was very positive: for a number of years, all leaf burning was stopped, and air quality during autumn improved significantly.

Relations with government – Local city and municipal authorities issued formal ordinances prohibiting leaf burning and introduced a fine of up to one monthly salary; the Ministry of Environment supported this initiative and issued “environmental patrol” IDs for schoolchildren as well as disseminated information through its own network to other cities in Turkmenistan.

Environmental impact – Significant, low-cost air quality improvement occurred during autumn for a number of years.

Outreach to other NGOs – *Yashil* has been successfully working in a cooperative fashion on many practical and educational environmental activities and sharing knowledge with other NGOs, including “Young Geologist”, “Gunorta”, “JAN”, “Dashoguz Ecological Club”, and “Kopetdag”.

Impact

In addition to generating municipal and governmental authorities’ interest and support, *Yashil* attracted many children, their parents and local communities to their environmental activities, raised public awareness of environmental problems, and consistently continues to expand their educational and training programs.

* *Yashil* was established in 1996, but is still unregistered; uses umbrella of CATENA, which is one of the five environmental NGOs registered in Turkmenistan.

Project name:	1999 "Ecological Trail," and 2000 "Clean Shores for Ural River," and 2001 Earth Day Celebrations
Grantees:	Youth Club "Eco"* and NGOs Resource Center, Atyrau, Kazakhstan
Total amount:	\$2,000.00 (Atyrau Resource Center grant)
Implementation:	1999 – 2001
Goals and objectives:	To 1) raise environmental awareness of schoolchildren and their parents of environmental problems and the natural and social history of the region through four field trips and site visits; and 2) create an "environmental museum."

Program Summary

Schoolchildren participated in four field trips where they learned about environmental problems and the history of their region, collected natural objects, and documented their findings in photos and a booklet (later prepared with help from UN volunteers, and published with UNDP support). *Eco* members outreached to other schools, whose kids became interested and actively participated in related activities. OKIOC, a private oil company, grant-funded part of the museum equipment.

Based on this experience, *Eco* spearheaded the "Clean Shores" initiative aimed at clearing the riverbanks of garbage and waste. Over 1,500 kids and their parents, ISAR and other donor organizations' staff, as well as private-sector representatives participated in this activity, which was repeated later as part of the Earth Day celebration.

Media interest – All activities were regularly covered by local media.

Public awareness and participation – Youth and the general public began to consciously participate in environment-related activities.

Relations with government – The school where *Eco* is based has been officially registered as an "ecological school." *Eco* also seeks support for its activities from a new governor, who is a former minister of environment and natural resources, and his new administration.

Environmental impact – Garbage and waste have been collected, unauthorized dumpsites have been closed, and the activities are monitored by schoolchildren.

Outreach to other NGOs – In addition to involving hundreds of youth and their parents in their activities and trips, *Eco* works in a collaborative fashion with other NGOs, and, more importantly, with the private sector, including representatives of oil companies, as well as the donor community. UNDP financed publication of a booklet describing results of selected activities implemented by *Eco*. This NGO is actively looking for alternative sources of financing for its activities, including local environmental agency and an Environmental Protection Fund.

Impact

The initiatives have significantly increased environmental awareness, and continuous activities are implemented with increasing participation.

* Club *Eco* was established in early 1998 and officially registered in September 1998.

Evaluation, Scope of Work & Methodology

Evaluation

The basic mandate of an *evaluation* is twofold: 1) to analyze & measure to what extent and how efficiently operational programs and projects that support certain activities are producing the desired results, and 2) to feed back the analytical information into the formulation of new directions and programs. The reporting aspect of evaluation strengthens accountability & transparency. The learning dimension assists the client's management with decision-making. To distill useful lessons in an effective manner, evaluation experts need to interact closely with clients and beneficiaries at all levels, and other stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation process.

Whereas evaluation is a periodic, including interim evaluation during implementation, assessment, *monitoring* is a continuous collection of data prior to and during project activity. These data, when analyzed (*mid-term evaluation*), pinpoint progress or constraints as early as possible, allowing project managers to adjust activities as needed. Monitoring also provides the basis for other types of evaluation, which can be *terminal evaluation* at the end of the project, and *impact evaluation* some time after the completion of the project, given the inevitable lag in responses of social and environmental systems due to project interventions.

The evaluation involves a) *self-evaluation* by managers from financing institutions, clients and beneficiary organizations, and b) an *independent evaluation* by recognized experts. In both circumstances, evaluation measures achievements in relation to clearly articulated policies, program objective and the goals set for each project activity. Evaluation provides an objective basis for assessing the performance of policies, programs, projects, and processes. It also seeks to improve those policies and programs by identifying and disseminating the lessons learned from experience.

Basic principles of any evaluation include:

- **Independence.** This means that in order to ensure impartiality of its analysis, findings and conclusions, evaluation should be independent from key stakeholders at all stages of the process
- **Usefulness.** Decision-makers and beneficiaries must perceive the findings and conclusions as geared to existing operational concerns and intended to improve sustainability and effectiveness of activities.
- **Transparency.** Planning & process of, and all evaluation reports should be available to all stakeholders.
- **Credibility.** The credibility of evaluation rests on the professional quality and impartiality of the experts, the rigor and objectivity of its methods, and the ready availability of its findings and conclusions.

Evaluation includes analysis of *performance* (inputs & outputs) and *outcomes* (impacts)¹.

¹ We distinguish the following performance indicators: 1) *input indicators* which help to monitor the project-specific resources provided, 2) *output indicators* which measure goods and services provided under the project, 3) *outcome indicators* which measure the immediate or short-term results of the project, and 4) *impact indicators* which monitor and measure the longer-term, more pervasive and sustainable results of the project.

Evaluation of the performance of ISAR will review the adequacy of process and systems, and quality management at projects' identification, preparation, appraisal/approval, and monitoring of implementation. It will also assess the quality and capabilities of staff associated with various programs, and interactions between the Headquarters and local offices.

Evaluation of beneficiaries' performance will assess the existing policy environment, the level of commitment to the objectives and goals of programs and projects, the administrative procedures and the quality of projects' design and of the decision-making.

Evaluation of the outcomes (impacts) will assess projects from various perspectives, including *relevance* of projects' designs and goals to the objectives of the USAID strategies and programs, *efficiency* in relations to inputs, looking at costs, implementation times, and results. Outcomes' evaluations will employ three interdependent criteria: 1) **overall outcome**, i.e. "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory", the former meaning that the project has achieved all its major goals; 2) **sustainability**, i.e. that the achievement of the intended results will allow the acquired capabilities to develop without exogenous support, and 3) **institutional development**, i.e. NGOs have improved their capabilities to effectively use their human, organizational and financial resources in pursuing charted objectives.

Scope of Work (SOW)

The overall purpose of the current evaluation was to objectively and independently assess how the ISAR program(s) fit and contributed to the USAID/CAR assistance strategy under well-defined objectives, especially SO 2.1 and SO 3.3.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Analyze how successful the ISAR model has been in setting regional partnerships, providing micro grants, and bolstering the effectiveness and capacity of regional NGOs
- Analyze whether ISAR approaches are replicable and could potentially provide models for other programs
- Investigate the existing and potential synergies between the assistance ISAR is providing to NGOs in the region and the assistance being provided by USAID to other sectors as well as any "hidden" benefits ISAR program(s) might have for other areas of regional cooperation in the promotion of sustainable development
- Document the effectiveness and contribution of ISAR's program(s) to strengthening the democratic process in Central Asia
- Assess whether or not citizens have undertaken actions that either directly or indirectly result in political, economic, and environmental improvements, and to what extent ISAR's program(s) contributed to these successes and/or failures
- Assess how well ISAR programming is coordinated with and complements programs of other USAID Central Asian partners and multilateral, and bilateral donors, and finally
- Determine the degree to which the grant programs and technical assistance under various components have increased NGO's sustainability.

In addition, the SOW articulated objectives and questions specific to each ISAR program(s)/components (see the complete scope of work at the end of this annex).

Methodology

In accordance with the SOW and prior to departure to Central Asia, the evaluation team conducted in-depth interviews with staff from USAID Headquarters Bureau for Europe and Central Asia, Office of Democracy and Governance, and Environment and Natural Resources Division. The team also met with senior management of ISAR in Washington D.C. and a representative from Moscow Offices. The evaluation SOW was shared and discussed in detail with ISAR. The senior management and staff from Headquarters of Counterpart International, The Eurasia Foundation, ABA/CEELI shared valuable insights and information describing on-going programs and projects in CAR.

The evaluation team timely requested from ISAR diverse information and data related to various aspects of ISAR CA and modifications, program(s) initiation, elaboration, implementation, supervision, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The requested information reflected on the scope of work for evaluation team and covered the 1993 – 2001 period. It related to all ISAR program(s)/components in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, including lists of beneficiary NGOs, grants announcements, project selection and eligibility criteria, financial reporting, minutes of Expert Board meetings, agreed performance and impact monitoring indicators, ISAR quarterly reports to USAID, newsletters, publications and copies of available press coverage, and communications between ISAR & USAID.

After the requested information was received, it was carefully reviewed by the evaluation team, and drafts of **NGOs Questionnaire** and **Interview Questions** (Annexes 3 and 4 respectively) were prepared for USAID review. After USAID clearance, and prior to departure to CAR, these two documents were timely communicated to ISAR field offices and staff. The team also requested that these documents be shared with all relevant NGOs, local governments and donor community interviewees in the field.

The evaluation team has also developed “internal” Assessment Checklist, which sought to help team members to assess strengths, weaknesses, and sustainability of selected/interviewed NGOs.

ISAR local offices, NGOs and USAID US partner organizations were timely alerted of the upcoming evaluation mission, appropriate meetings requested and set-up. However, due to conflicting schedules, the team did not meet with a number of representatives who participated in regional meetings outside the capitals and cities, or were travelling on their own business, when we visited particular countries.

Upon arrival to Almaty, Kazakhstan, the evaluation met with USAID/CAR staff to review and fine-tune the schedule of the evaluation. USAID/CAR provided background briefings to the team, which significantly helped to sharpen the focus and the scope of the evaluation. USAID offices in Tashkent and Ashgabad provided excellent substantive and logistical support to the mission, which greatly enhanced effectiveness of its work, and was greatly appreciated by the team members.

The team visited, together with USAID staff from Almaty and Tashkent, all three capitals and Dashoguz in Turkmenistan, Nukus in Uzbekistan and Atyrau in Kazakhshtan as well as selected project cites in some rural areas. During the course of evaluation the team met with about 170 people representing various NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donors, and government agencies.

Out of 27 working days (648 hours) in the field, the evaluation team spent about: 140 hours travelling between the countries, cities and to meetings, and 270 hours in meetings (total is about 63% of field time), 48 hours writing the minutes of the meetings and drafting the final report.

STATEMENT OF WORK

ISAR EVALUATION

I. TITLE/BACKGROUND

Evaluation of ISAR

In 1992, the program of support for environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) run by the Initiative for Social Action and Renewal (ISAR) was developed in response to USAID's strong commitment to encourage grassroots efforts to promote environmental protection. In line with the citizen participation objectives of the NIS, USAID and ISAR entered into a cooperative agreement. The initial cooperative agreement was signed on May 4, 1993 and has been extended on several occasions.

The ISAR program has now entered its seventh year of project implementation in Central Asia. The initial program was part of ISAR's Seeds of Democracy program, which ran from May 1993 through 1997. ISAR developed and managed a small grants program, which gave grants to over 300 NGOs for environmental activities. While implementing the Seeds program, ISAR also implemented a cooperative grants program for Central Asian and US environmental NGOs, which supported 3 cooperative projects of up to \$25,000. Following the Seeds of Democracy program, ISAR implemented an Expert Exchange program, which fostered cooperation among Central Asian NGOs and NGOs from other parts of the FSU. The Expert Exchange program facilitated cooperation and exchange of expertise from more to less experienced environmental NGOs, thus strengthening the organizational and technical capacity of regional NGOs. The overall purpose of both the Seeds and Expert Exchange programs was to encourage, and improve the capacity of, citizens to undertake actions that would directly or indirectly result in environmental improvements. The two goals of grass-roots democracy building and environmental improvements became intertwined in this program and the two cannot really be separated from each other. Therefore, this evaluation should look at the extent to which the Seeds of Democracy program and its successors (the latter two listed below to a lesser extent), described below, led to gains in the spheres of both democracy building and environmental improvements.

After the end of the Seeds of Democracy and Expert Exchange Programs, USAID/CAR developed three successor programs, all also carried out by ISAR. At present, ISAR's program in Central Asia has three major components:

(1) Caspian Environmental Partnership Initiative (CEPI), which focuses on building sustainable partnerships between environmental NGOs in the Caspian region. Within ISAR/CEPI, there are five main activities:

- A conference for NGOs, which launched ISAR/CEPI activities in March 1999;
- Micro grants to allow NGOs to build Internet and e-mail capacity and training for local NGOs working on Caspian-related themes;
- Cooperative grants for regional NGOs working on joint environmental issues;
- A Russian-language on-line information bulletin, CaspInfo, which is a free service to NGOs, businesses and individuals interested in the region; and

- A seminar series focused on topics relevant to the regional NGO community.
- (2) The Atyrau program, which includes establishment and maintenance of an NGO Resource Center in Atyrau, Kazakhstan, to develop and strengthen the NGO community in this area; and
- (3) A Remote Grants Program that focuses on assisting regional NGOs in strengthening programmatic capacity by providing small grants.

II. SCOPE OF WORK

A. Purpose:

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess how the ISAR programs fit and contributed to the USAID/CAR's assistance strategy, especially SO 2.1 "Increased, better-informed citizens' participation in political and economic decision making" and/or SO 3.3 "Reduced Environmental Risks to Public Health." This will be an objective, external assessment of the assistance provided under the ISAR Cooperative Agreement, both under the Seeds of Democracy Program and the three successor programs. Assessment analysis and recommendations will be used by the Office of Democratic Transition to evaluate effectiveness of ISAR's programs, and will help ODT develop its strategy regarding future ISAR's programming.

B. The Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation of all four components are:

- To assess how successful the ISAR model has been as well as what elements of ISAR's methods of setting up regional partnerships, providing micro grants, and bolstering the effectiveness and capacity of regional NGOs are replicable and could potentially provide models for other programs. To assess the existing and potential synergies between the assistance ISAR is providing to NGOs in the region and the assistance being provided by USAID to other sectors. The evaluation should look at the potential "hidden" or ancillary benefits ISAR programs might have for other areas of regional cooperation, partnerships, and in the promotion of sustainable development.
- To document the effectiveness and contribution of ISAR's programs in strengthening the democratic process in Central Asia;
- To assess whether or not citizens have undertaken actions that either directly or indirectly result in political, economic, and environmental improvements; if not, why not; what were the successful strategies; and to what extent ISAR's programs contribute to these successes or failures;
- To assess how well ISAR programming in Central Asia is coordinated with and complements programs of other donors and USAID/CAR's partners in the region (Counterpart Consortium, American Bar Association, Eurasia, etc.);
- To determine the degree to which the grants programs and training under the various components have increased NGOs' sustainability.

C. Proposed Recommendations

As a result of the assessment, recommendations will be made

- On those existing activities that should be discontinued or expanded;
 - On new initiatives or complementary assistance to be undertaken in the future to ensure the sustainability of project accomplishments.

In addition, the evaluation has objectives specific to each program component:

Seeds of Democracy Program and the Expert Exchange Program (1993-1997):

- to determine the lessons learned from this initial ISAR program
- to determine the impact of this initial group of grants and exchanges
- to determine the extent to which these grants and exchanges aided in both improving environmental conditions and increasing environmental awareness
- to determine whether these grants and exchanges improved NGO survival rates and long-term viability

Remote Grants Program (1999-2001):

- to assess the specific impact of the activities carried out by NGOs financed by this program
- to determine the degree to which the grants programs have led to increased NGO sustainability and success
- to learn what percent of the NGOs' budgets are covered by grants vs. other sources of revenue

Atyrau NGO Resource Center (1999-2002):

- to describe the services and resources provided by the Atyrau NGO Resource Center to assist NGOs in reaching their goals of sustainability, networking, information gathering, etc.
- to assess the degree to which the Atyrau NGO Resource Center can achieve sustainability in the future.
- to determine the steps that need to be taken to ensure sustainability of the center and the NGOs it is serving.

CEPI (1998-2001):

- to determine the demand on the ISAR's office in Central Asia and on the Atyrau office, and their contribution to the CEPI program to the extent possible
- to assess the impact of the CEPI partnership activities and grants to date with respect to Kazakh and Turkmen NGOs, and to assess whether or not partnerships created under CEPI with participation of Kazakh and Turkmen NGOs are likely to be sustainable in the absence of continuing donor aid
- to document successes to date of these partnerships in highlighting the environmental needs/problems of the Caspian and bringing more focused activism and attention to these problems

III. TEAM COMPOSITION

The contractor will propose a team of two people, possessing collectively the following skills and background:

- NGO development experience and an understanding of the role NGOs play in both democratization and promotion of sustainable environmental management
- At least 10 years combined experience working directly with the NGO sector and/or community participation, a portion of that in the field, preferably in the NIS and/or Central Asia specifically
- Knowledge of the particular challenges that NGOs in the former Soviet Union face
- Significant experience with issues related to environment and natural resources and grass roots organizations.

Both team members should possess

- Russian language skills
- Experience in carrying out evaluations of USAID grant programs and/or project design activities
- Superior written and verbal communication skills

The team will work together with USAID/CAR/Office of Democratic Transition, and report to the USAID/CAR/ODT Director and/or his designee(s).

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Prior to departure from the U.S. the contractors shall:

1. Conduct a careful review of background documents, including:
 - Core project documents
 - project authorizations and proposals
 - cooperative agreements, amendments
 - workplans, quarterly reports and newsletters
 - performance indicators developed by USAID/CAR and ISAR
 - Materials developed for/during the implementation of the cooperative agreement, including grant announcements, program descriptions, grant contracts, and impact indicators discussion documents.
2. Conduct interviews with ISAR staff and board members, ISAR's American NGO partners who have participated in various programs, and USAID (ENR) staff in Washington.
3. Prepare a draft list of:
 - a. Interview questions
 - b. Proposed list of people to interview
 - c. Interviews scheduled

4. Conduct a start-up briefing with E&E staff to discuss feedback on proposed research and interview questions and contacts, as well as to determine feasibility of interviews in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

B. Once in the field, the contractor shall:

1. Review grantee narrative reports, reporting forms developed for staff and project participants as well as relevant review board documents.
2. Conduct an extensive field program review primarily in Kazakhstan and secondarily in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The field review shall include brief meetings with USAID Mission officials, ISAR in-country staff, ISAR review boards, and donor representatives and more in-depth meetings with grantees, training recipients, and NGOs active in Central Asia (which may or may not be a part of ISAR's NGO network).

Prior to departure, the contractor will discuss the field interview results with USAID/CAR/Office of Democratic Transition and/or the Front Office.

V. SCHEDULE

The evaluation will start in April 2001, with the entire assignment taking place over a seven-week period. The Contractor is authorized to work 6 days a week.

A. Washington, Pre-Field Work

Four days will be spent conducting interviews and holding briefings in the U.S. During the course of this time period, it will be reviewing with USAID/Washington (PCS and ENR) and ISAR/Washington staff the proposed interview schedule and lists of people to be interviewed. ISAR's help may be solicited to schedule appointments for interviews and meetings as well as for collection and review of documents.

B. Field Work

Four weeks will be spent in Central Asia for data collection and preliminary analysis (two weeks in Kazakhstan, one week in Turkmenistan and one week in Uzbekistan). One week to ten days will then be spent in Kazakhstan to prepare and submit a draft report to USAID/CAR before their departure. The team will provide a debrief at the end of this time period with USAID/CAR staff in Almaty.

During the field work, the evaluation team will make two-day trips to Atyrau (Kazakhstan), Nukus (Uzbekistan), and Dashoguz (Turkmenistan). Decision on whether both members or only one member of the team will go will be made *in situ*.

C. Washington, Post-Field Work

One day will be spent in Washington for debriefing, and up to one week may be used for revision and submission of the final report after receipt of USAID's comments.

VI. DELIVERABLES

All deliverables shall be submitted to USAID/Washington, USAID/CAR and ISAR in duplicate.

The following deliverables shall be submitted and receive input/comments from USAID and ISAR prior to the team's departure for field work:

- Draft questionnaire for NGO grant recipients and trainees under ISAR's program
- Draft list of interviewees and itinerary
- Draft report outline should be submitted prior to the conclusion of the site visits.

The following list of deliverables shall be submitted for USAID and ISAR comments/input prior to departure from Almaty:

- Draft report that includes at least the following:
 - An executive summary
 - An assessment of successes and failures in ISAR's programs
 - Recommendations on those existing activities that should be discontinued or expanded
 - Recommendations on new initiatives or complementary assistance to be undertaken in the future to ensure the sustainability of project accomplishments
 - An overview of ten (or more) success stories of impact attributable to ISAR small grants
 - Summary of findings and conclusions
- Oral presentations to ISAR and USAID of draft final report, findings and conclusions, to be scheduled with USAID/Washington Project Officer in DC, and with ODT in Almaty.

The final deliverable(s) shall be submitted no later than one week after receipt of comments from ISAR and USAID on the draft final report and the oral presentation:

- Final report, incorporating ISAR and USAID comments on draft report and presentation to be submitted within one week of oral presentations. Final report, in CDIE format, should not exceed 40 pages and shall be presented to USAID/CAR, USAID/Washington and ISAR in hard copy and electronic format. Additional material may be submitted in Annexes, as appropriate, e.g. bibliography of documents analyzed, list of agencies and persons interviewed, and list of sites visited.
- Based on the results from the completed evaluation and all other pertinent data, the contractor will prepare a project evaluation summary, also in CDIE format. The summary will include evaluation abstract, purpose of activity, purpose of evaluation and methodology used, findings and conclusions, and recommendations. The summary will be submitted at the time of final report submission and will be presented both in hard and electronic copies as above.

NGO QUESTIONNAIRE

(To be completed by as many NGOs as possible, including grantees, applicants, non-applicants, NGO resource center, and NGO resource center clients. Questionnaire will be e-mailed to the extent possible)

1. Name of NGO & address (headquarters & other offices)
2. When was the organization founded? When did it start working? If it is registered, when was it registered?
3. Legal status (name of registering body)
4. Mission/Goals
5. Target Population
6. Geographic focus of organization (local, regional, national, international) and specific geographic areas covered.
7. Governance Structure (actual structure, if board of directors or advisory/management committee who is on this committee/board and how are the members selected)
8. Type of organization:
 - Advocacy Organization
 - Community Based Organization
 - Cooperative
 - Educational Institution
 - Labor or Trade Union
 - Professional Association
 - Research Institute
 - Service Provider (consulting, training, etc.)
 - Other (describe)
9. Core activities of organization
 - Environment
 - Cleanup of lands contaminated with toxic and hazardous waste
 - Education
 - Environmental management (includes air pollution, water pollution, solid waste management, and hazardous waste management)
 - Monitoring
 - Nature protection (includes biodiversity and conservation)
 - Stakeholder advocacy
 - Advocacy, type _____
 - Citizens' rights
 - Consulting (e.g. management, environmental, financial, etc.)
 - Governance

NGO QUESTIONNAIRE*(continued)*

- Institutional/NGO development
- Health, gender, family planning, etc.
- Human Rights
- Public information
- Training
- Social services to disadvantaged or others

10. Total Annual Budget

11. Total staff (1993, 1997, current)

12. Sources of financing/funding (in local currency & US\$, and percentage)

- Domestic (fees, donations, in-kind support (including volunteer support, membership dues)
- International donors such as ISAR/USAID, Counterpart/USAID, Eurasia/USAID, U.S. Democracy Commission, CIDA, SIDA, GTZ, etc., international organizations (World Bank, EBRD, ADB, UNDP, UNEP, UNHCR, etc.)
- Government sources (specify)
- Business sources
- Other NGO sources
- Individual sources (friends, family, volunteers, citizens)
- Describe the type of In-kind donations/support you have received.
- Describe the type of volunteer support you have received
- Do you give a monetary value to the in-kind support and/or volunteer support you receive? Why? Why not? If yes, how do you calculate these amounts?

13. Links with governmental and/or type of collaboration with other official organizations (joint projects, social contracting, coordination of efforts, community/environmental planning, provision of consulting service)

14. Who initiated the NGO?

15. Did this person or group come together because of common interests, an identified problem or for another reason?

16. Why did the founders decide to form the organization as an NGO rather than as a commercial organization?

17. Why did the founders decide to get registered as an NGO rather than work informally? What are the organization's Internal Strengths & Weaknesses

18. Which of the following characteristics are the greatest strengths of your NGO that have helped to lead it to success [rank 0 (not at all important) to 5 (very important)]

- Clarity of mission/goals
- Leadership's/staff's/volunteer's understanding of the broader social or economic context
- Qualifications of staff and volunteers
- Vision/energy of leadership

NGO QUESTIONNAIRE

(continued)

- Vision/energy of staff/volunteers/members
- Management skills of leadership
- Contacts
- Knowledge/expertise in field
- Organizational structure
- Internal systems and procedures
- Ethical standards/transparency
- Organizational experience
- Outreach to public
- Linkages with other organizations
- Relationship with government
- Relationship with business
- Funding
- Contact with target population
- Other (specify)

19. What are the greatest weaknesses of your NGO that lead to failures [rank 0 (not at all important) to 5 (very important)]?

- Unclear mission/goals
- Lack of leadership's/staff's/volunteer's understanding of the broader social or economic context
- Limited qualifications of staff and volunteers
- Lack of vision/energy of leadership
- Lack of vision/energy of staff/volunteers/members
- Lack of management skills of leadership
- Lack of contacts
- Limited knowledge/expertise in field
- Organizational structure
- Internal systems and procedures
- Lack of ethical standards/transparency
- Organizational experience
- Outreach to public
- Lack of linkages with similar organizations
- Relationship with government
- Relationship with business
- Inadequate funding
- Contact with target population
- Other (specify)

20. What are the greatest environmental obstacles that you face [rank 0 to 5 as above]?

- Underdeveloped civil society?
- Lack of enabling legislation?
- Poor implementation (and enforcement) of existing legislation?
- Lack of available resources from government/business/community?
- Lack of public trust in NGOs?

NGO QUESTIONNAIRE

(continued)

- Corruption?
- Underdeveloped NGO sector?
- Economic transition?
- Lack of public awareness/understanding of environmental issues?
- Other (specify)

21. How did you learn about ISAR & its grant program? [check all that are applicable]

- ☐ Approached by ISAR staff through written or personal contact
- ☐ Competition announcement
- ☐ NGO sector newsletter
- ☐ NGO resource center
- ☐ Other NGO
- ☐ Government representative
- ☐ Media
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Personal connections with ISAR staff
- ☐ Consultant
- ☐ Another donor
- ☐ Other

22. Did you pay for information about the grant program or application materials? If yes, whom?

23. At the time you submitted your organization's application, what made ISAR & its program attractive/Why did you apply for ISAR funding? [rank from 0 not considered at all to 5 (deciding factor)]

- Financial support for a project the organization had been planning to do
- Way to pay salaries of existing staff
- Generation of jobs for friends, family
- ISARs reputation and credibility
- Shared concerns
- Common goals, objectives, purposes
- Access to linkages with similar organizations
- Prestige or credibility gained from working with a foreign donor
- Opportunity to receive training
- Opportunity to receive technical assistance or consulting
- Exposure to international practices or modern technologies
- Opportunity to improve organizational capacity
- Equipment
- Contribution to local development
- Opportunity to develop a new project idea and receive funding
- Contribution to organizations' sustainability
- Other (specify)

24. Looking back on the funding and/or support you have received, how would you rank the factors below in terms of their importance to your organization? [rank from 0 not considered at all to 5 (deciding factor)]

NGO QUESTIONNAIRE

(continued)

- Financial support for a project the organization had been planning to do
- Way to pay salaries of existing staff
- Generation of jobs for friends, family
- ISAR's reputation and credibility
- Shared concerns
- Common goals, objectives, purposes
- Access to linkages with similar organizations
- Prestige or credibility gained from working with a foreign donor
- Opportunity to receive training
- Opportunity to receive technical assistance or consulting
- Exposure to international practices or modern technologies
- Opportunity to improve organizational capacity
- Equipment
- Contribution to local development
- Opportunity to develop a new project idea and receive funding
- Contribution to organizations' sustainability
- Other (specify)

DRAFT**ISAR Central Asia Activities Evaluation****Interview Questions**

(We do not expect to be able to get answers to all of the questions from each interviewee. However, we expect that we will be able to get answers to individual questions from multiple interviewees. This will allow us to obtain a complete picture of the influence of ISAR programs and adequately address the deliverables outlined in the SOW. Questions are divided by interviewee category. Questions for all NGOs are followed by additional questions that are tailored to different groups of NGOs depending on their relationships with ISAR.)

**All NGOs – Grantees, Grant Applicants, ISAR clients,
NGO resource center clients, other NGOs.**

- How did you get involved in the environmental movement? In NGO work? In your organization?
- Has your organization participated in public discussion of issues in your community, region or country? What kinds of issues? How has your organization participated? What was the outcome of the discussions? Do you feel that your participation was welcomed? By whom? Did your participation make a difference in the outcome? In the way, in which other participants view your organization or the NGO sector generally?
- Has your organization engaged in lobbying? On what issues? Where do these issues stand now? How did this lobbying affect your relations with administrative officials? Elected officials? At what level?
- Has your organization engaged in public education? Describe. What difference did your awareness campaign make? At what level?
- Has your organization participated in litigation? What were the issues? Facts? Applicable laws? What were the outcomes?
- Is the focus of your work small scale interventions/projects or broad societal impact?
- Explain your systems for decision-making (who & how); choice of activities and strategies; planning of activities; budgeting; recruitment of staff, volunteers, members; implementation of activities; monitoring and evaluation.
- Do you have permanent (salaried) staff? How were they recruited/selected?
- Do you have an employee handbook?
- Do you have an ethical code?
- How long do your staff members typically stay with your organization? Why have staff members left?
- Do you have volunteers (permanent, full time, part time, occasional, regular)? How are volunteers recruited/selected? How long do volunteers typically continue to work with your organization? How do you encourage them to continue their work?
- Do you have a membership program? Do the members pay dues? What kind of memberships do you offer, and who are your members (individual, corporate, yearly, lifelong, fees, etc.)?
- What are your staff and volunteers' needs? How do you identify and meet these needs?
- What type of training do NGO staff & volunteers receive? How are training needs identified? How is training obtained? What are additional training needs? How will these be met?
- How many citizens have participated in your programs?
- What kinds of projects are most likely to attract citizen participation?

Interview Questions (continued)

- Is your organization financially sustainable?
- Do you currently have any foreign donor funding? From whom?
- Do you currently have any local funding sources, including in-kind and volunteer support?
- What would happen if all foreign funding for your organization were to disappear?

ISAR Clients (grantees and training/TA recipients)

- Has your role as an activist changed since you received support from ISAR?
- Has your NGO's role in society changed since it received support from ISAR?
- Have any of your procedures/systems for the following changed since you received support from ISAR: decision making (who & how); choice of activities and strategies; planning of activities; budgeting; recruitment of staff, volunteers, members; implementation of activities; monitoring and evaluation? Explain.
- How have you evaluated the impact of your project in your region?
- What is your relationship with ISAR staff?
- If ISAR were to try to help organizations like yours in another region, would you recommend any changes to the program?
- Have any of your partners, including business and government, received any training or funding through foreign donors? Has this training affected your organizations' work and/or success?
- Have you received funding from any other foreign or local donors? Did the training or grant you received from ISAR contribute or detract from the accomplishment of your goals for use of those funds?
- Have you received training from any other program? Did that training help you fulfill the goals under your ISAR project?
- Has support from ISAR helped you achieve goals that were not related to your ISAR-funded project? Explain.
- Do you know of any other programs that support similar projects to yours and/or in which you would like to be involved?
- Do you know of any other organizations in your region that have received support through USAID funding? Have you benefited in any way from the support they have received (e.g. better reputation or relations with government for NGO sector in region)?

ISAR grantees (including grantees from Remote Grants Program)

- Was funding from ISAR your first grant from a foreign donor?
- Have you received grants from other donors before/after your ISAR grant?
- Explain how, if at all, your financial management system has changed since you received funding from ISAR.
- Has your budget significantly changed since you received a grant from ISAR?
- Have your monthly core expenditures significantly changed since you received a grant from ISAR? If yes, will you be able to support these increased expenditures once your grant has ended? Which ones? How?
- Are you now in a better or worse position to sustain your organization's activities than you were prior to receiving a grant from ISAR?
- What kind of non-financial support did you receive from ISAR?
- Do you feel that ISAR's reporting, monitoring and evaluation standards are manageable? Fair? Necessary?

Interview Questions (continued)

- What impact have the reporting, monitoring, evaluation requirements had on your organization's procedures and viability?
- Are there impacts that you achieved with ISAR funding that you could not have achieved without this funding? Once funding has/will end, were/will these impacts be lost? Why? Why not?
- Was ISAR funding more important to your organization because it helped you address a specific issue while there was a window of opportunity or because it contributed to the long-term sustainability of your organization? Explain.

Seeds of Democracy Program and the Expert Exchange Program participants

- What have been the most important results of your project?
- How many people did you reach through your project? Explain how you have determined this number?
- Have you gathered statistics or done market research to determine the changes in public environmental awareness in your region/city/town? If so, what were the results of this research?
- Can you link any specific improvements in the environment in your community/region/country with your involvement in the Seeds of Democracy and Expert Exchange Program? How did your participation in these programs affect the outcome or your organizations ability to achieve results?
- Would your organization still be in operation today if you had not participated in the Seeds of Democracy/Expert Exchange Program?
- If organization is no longer in existence, what happened? Where did the staff, volunteers go after the organization closed down?
- Do you continue to maintain contacts with the organization with which you exchanged staff/information through the program?

CEPI participants

- With which ISAR office do you have the most contact? What is the nature of your contact with different ISAR offices?
- What are the most important impacts for your organization, community and the Caspian Sea that are the result of your participation in the CEPI program?
- Will your project continue when/if funding for the CEPI program ceases? Why? Why not? Are there significant costs involved in continued participation? How will you finance these costs?
- Have you forged any new partnerships as a result of your participation in the CEPI program? Describe? What have the primary benefits of these partnerships been? Will these partnerships continue once funding ceases?
- Was your organization previously involved in Caspian Sea environmental issues prior to the CEPI program? If not, would your organization have addressed Caspian Sea issues if the CEPI program did not exist? Why? Why not?
- If yes, how has your organization's role in addressing Caspian Sea environmental issues changed since you began participating in the CEPI program? Has the relative importance of this issue changed for your organization since you began participating in the CEPI program? Is this positive or negative?
- Has your participation in the CEPI program been a positive experience? Has the impact on your organization been positive?

Interview Questions (continued)

Atyrau Resource Center

- What is the mission of the Atyrau resource center (important for comparison with original concept and measurement of center's own level of development/professionalism)?
- How many registered NGOs are there in the Atyrau region?
- How many of these NGOs are active?
- How many non-registered NGOs, initiative groups, informal community based organizations are there in the region?
- How many clients do you have?
- What services are you providing to these clients?
- Which services are most popular?
- How do you evaluate the success of your work?
- To what extent are NGOs working together?
- Do you charge for any of your services?
- Do you think that NGOs in the region will ever be able to pay for services? Why? Why not?
- What would contribute to NGOs being able to pay for services?
- Do you have any contact with businesses (local, international)? What is the nature of this contact?
- Do you think that businesses are aware of your work?
- Is business supportive or in opposition to your mission, activities, methods? Explain?
- Do you receive any in-kind support from individuals, other NGOs, business or government?

NGOs in Atyrau region (clients/non-clients, these questions are in addition to questions for all NGOs above)

- Do you use the services of the Atyrau NGO resource center? Why? Why not?
- What services does the resource center offer?
- Which services do you feel are most useful? Why?
- How do you feel about the quality of the services offered?
- How do you learn about the services offered by the resource center?
- Are there services that you wish the resource center offered but are not currently offered?
- If you have used the services of the resource center, what was the effect of these services on your organization? On your work? On the results of your activities? On your target population?
- Do you believe that the resource center views its clients as customers? Partners? Competitors for funding? Superior? Inferior?
- What kind of information do you receive from the resource center? Is this information valuable? What other information would you like to receive?
- Does the resource center have favorite clients?
- Do all NGOs have equal access to the services of the resource center?
- If the resource center were to start charging for its services, would you be willing/able to pay for some services?
- Which services would you be most willing/able to pay for? What percentage of your organization's budget would you be willing/able to spend on resource center services?
- Would you be willing to barter for services from the resource center? If yes, what in-kind or voluntary services could you offer the resource center?

Organizations that applied but did not receive funding or support from ISAR

- Do you feel that ISAR's review process was fair and equitable?

Interview Questions (continued)

- Did you fully understand the criteria by which your proposal/application was reviewed before submission?
- Did you get an adequate explanation of why your project was not funded or you did not receive support?
- If ISAR were to run another competition, would you apply? Why? Why not?
- Do you feel that the organizations that received funding/support deserved this support? Why? Why not?
- Have you applied to other donors for funding? For the same project? Did you receive funding?
- Have you received training from other donors? In what areas?
- How do you feel your skills compare to the skills of ISAR grantees and/or clients? Before they received support from ISAR? Now?
- Does your organization need funds to achieve its mission/goals?
- How does your organization sustain itself financially?
- How do you feel your chances of achieving sustainability compare to those of ISAR grantees/clients? Explain.

Other Donors

- Description of donor's activities and programs.
- Are you familiar with ISAR's programs in the region?
- Which of ISAR's programs do you believe are most effective/ineffective? Why?
- Among other donors, would you consider ISAR to be a strong or weak player in the region?
- Do you currently collaborate with ISAR in any way? Why? Why not?
- Do your clients/grantees collaborate with ISAR or with ISAR clients/grantees on the ground?
- Do you have any clients/grantees that have also received funding/support from ISAR? If so, would it be possible to get a contact list of these organizations?
- What role does ISAR play in the donor community? Leadership? Collaborator? Coordinator?
- Do you believe that ISAR's programs are contributing to environmental improvements in the region? Why? Why not?
- Do you believe that ISAR's programs are contributing to citizen participation in political/economic decision-making in the region? Why? Why not?
- Do you believe that ISAR's grassroots approach is the best way to achieve environmental improvements in Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan? Why? Why not?
- Do you believe that ISAR's grassroots approach is the best way to achieve increased citizen participation in political/economic processes in Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, or Turkmenistan? Why? Why not?
- Are ISAR's programs contributing to improved skills among NGOs?
- Are ISAR's programs contributing to improved visibility of NGOs?
- Are ISAR's programs having a positive or negative influence of governmental and societal views of NGOs?
- What could ISAR change about its strategy/implementation to improve its results in the region?
- Is the size of grants made by ISAR appropriate for the region?
- Has your strategy/niche been developed with ISAR's programs in mind?
- Do you see ISAR as a stepping stone or next step to support for your grantees/clients?
- Which elements of ISAR's programs have been particularly effective or successful? What are the factors that have contributed to success?
- Which elements have been particularly weak or unsuccessful? Why?
- Would you replicate any of ISAR's programs or approaches in your own work? Why? Why not?
- Would you welcome additional ISAR programs in the region?

Interview Questions (continued)

- Should USAID continue to provide support to ISAR's programs in the region? Why? Why not? Could the funds be better used for other environmental programs?
- Do you know of other methodologies in the region or in other similar regions that ISAR might consider adopting?

ISAR Field Staff

- What is ISAR's mission in Central Asia? In specific regions?
- How did you begin working for ISAR?
- What is your educational/employment background?
- Had you ever worked for an NGO or were you familiar with the NGO sector before beginning work for ISAR?
- Does ISAR serve as an example to its clients?
- What is the relationship between field offices and ISAR/Washington?
- What are ISAR's greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the greatest obstacles to the success of ISAR's programs?
- Are particular components of ISAR's programs particularly difficult or easy to administer? Explain?
- What is ISAR's relationship with USAID like? What are some of the challenges that ISAR faces in working with USAID?
- Does ISAR receive adequate support (other than financial) from the USAID mission?
- How might ISAR expand its programs? What would be the impact of such expansion?
- How do you learn about potential NGO clients?
- How are training, T/A, exchange, etc. clients selected?
- Do you feel that ISAR/your ISAR office is democratic? Why? Why not?
- Do you think most/some/only a few grantees use the funds they receive as outlined in their proposal?
- Do you think that most grantees successfully complete their projects?
- What are the primary obstacles faced by grantees in fulfilling their projects/overall?
- What is your relationship with clients? Partner? Advisor? Regulator? Service provider? Etc.
- What percent of staff time is devoted to the CEPI program?
- Does the CEPI program contribute to or detract from the success of your other programs? Explain.

ISAR Advisory Committee Members

- How did you become involved with ISAR?
- How long have you been a member of the advisory committee?
- What is the role of advisory board members? In principle? In reality?
- How are new advisory board members selected?
- How often do new members join the advisory committee?
- Do you feel that the composition of the advisory committee changes often enough?
- How are new ideas generated?
- What is the relationship of advisory board members with ISAR?
- What is the relationship of advisory board members' organizations with ISAR?
- Do you have contact with ISAR grantees and clients? What is the nature of that contact?
- Do you have contact with NGOs that have not received support from ISAR? What is the nature of this impact?
- How important is a local advisory board to ISAR's success?
- Does a local advisory board create any challenges? How are these addressed?
- Does the advisory board play a role in evaluating individual projects and/or programs? Explain?

Interview Questions

(continued)

- Do you consider ISAR's programs to be successful (overall and by individual program)? Why? Why not?
- What are the most important contributors to ISAR's success/failure to succeed (overall and by individual program)
- What are the most important impacts of the ISAR program?
- Have there been any unexpected impacts of the program?
- Have there been any unexpected obstacles to success?
- What role does the advisory board play in publicizing ISAR's programs?

ISAR Grant Review Committee Members

- Did you receive written materials outlining the review process and evaluation criteria?
- Did you have adequate time to review these procedures and criteria?
- Did the procedures and criteria seem fair and transparent? If no, explain.
- Were the discussions of the review committee confidential? In principle? In reality?
- How were you selected to participate in the review committee?
- Did you have adequate time to review proposals?
- Did you provide written or oral comments on proposals? On all proposals or only a portion of proposals?
- How could the review procedures be improved?
- In how many ISAR review committees have you participated?
- Has the review process changed over time? If yes, for better or for worse?
- Does ISAR request your advice on improvements to the process? If yes, do you feel that these recommendations are given adequate attention?
- Have you participated in review committees for other donors? If yes, how do the other processes/results compare to those of ISAR?
- Do you receive information about projects selected with your participation once they have begun to be/have been implemented?
- What do you think about the objectives of ISAR's programs? Are the objectives appropriate for the region? Do they fill a need? Is this the most important need?
- Do you believe that ISAR's approach is the most effective ways to achieve ISAR's objectives?

Press/Media (if possible)

- Are people in your region aware of environmental issues?
- How do they receive information about environmental issues?
- Do citizens engage in environmental, political, environmental decision making? Why? Why not?
- Has citizen awareness of environmental issues changed in the past few (depending on region and program) years? What are some indicators of this change? What are the causes of this increase/decrease in awareness?
- Has citizen engagement in addressing environmental issues changed over the past few years? What are some examples of engagement? What are the causes of this increase/decrease?
- Have any environmental issues or events surrounding environmental issues been particularly exciting, popular, famous, notorious in your community? What were the facts surrounding these issues or events?
- What is the role of NGOs in the region? Do they contribute to public awareness of environmental issues? Other issues? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Interview Questions (continued)

- Do you regularly publish articles on NGO and/or environmental issues? Governmental projects related to environment? Businesses engaged in areas effecting the environment? NGOs engaged in projects related to the environment? Why? Why not?
- Generally speaking, is it necessary for an NGO to pay to have an article published about its activities or about an issue it feels is important? How much would this normally cost?
- Do you face any constraints in publishing articles about environmental issues or about NGOs generally?

Business (presumably, businesses that have had contact/built relationships with NGOs as identified by ISAR, other donors and NGOs)

- How did you become involved with environmental NGOs/ X NGO in your community? What attracted you to build a relationship with this/these organization(s)?
- What is the nature of your relationship? Partnership? Support? Donor/Donee? Etc.
- Did you know that the organization had funding/assistance from an international donor? Was this important?
- Do you believe that NGOs are important in achieving environmental improvements in your community? Why? What role do they play?
- Do you believe that NGOs should play a role in political/economic decision making in your community? Why? Why not? What role?
- Are the NGOs in your community professional? Why? What not? Criteria?
- What motivates you to work with or support this/these NGO(s)?
- Why don't more businesses support/work with NGOs?
- What are the obstacles that businesses face in supporting NGOs?
- What would make you stop working with/supporting this/these NGO(s)?

Government

- Are there any NGOs in your community? If yes, which NGOs are strongest?
- Do you think that the NGOs in your community are a positive or negative force? Why?
- Do the NGOs in your community receive any form of support from your department or another government entity?
- Do you work with any NGOs in your community? If yes, which ones?
- How did you identify these groups?
- What is your relationship with environmental organizations?
- Are environmental organizations active in your community?
- Do environmental NGOs have any real impact in the community? Why? Why not?
- Are the environmental NGOs in your community professional?
- If an NGO were able to generate funding for a project of mutual interest, would you be able/willing to match those funds? Why? Why not?
- Are NGOs able to make presentations to local elected and/or administrative officials?

People Interviewed

ISAR

1. Ms. Eliza K. Klose – Executive Director, Washington D.C., (202) 387 3034, eklose@isar.org
2. Ms. Kate Watters – Director of Programs, Washington D.C., (202) 387 3034, kwatters@isar.org
3. Ms. Michelle Kinman – International Programs Liaison, Washington D.C., (202) 387 3034, michelle@isar.org
4. Ms. Gail R. Guy – Financial Co-Director, Washington, D.C., (202) 387 3034, gguy@isar.org
5. Mr. Jay Owens – Financial Co-Director, Washington, D.C., (202) 387 3034, jowens@isar.org
6. Ms. Susan Gallagher – Atyrau Program Coordinator, Atyrau, Kazakhstan, 7 (31222) 3 10 29, susang@astel.kz
7. Mr. Ross MacLaren - Regional Director, Almaty, Kazakhstan, (3272) 92 71 88, 92 86 20, ross@isar.almaty.kz oorsus@yahoo.co.uk
8. Ms. Zarema Imenova – Information Coordinator, Almaty, Kazakhstan, zarema@isar.almaty.kz
9. Mr. Aleksei Knijnikov – Program Coordinator, CEPI, Moscow, Russian Federation, (7095) 251 76 17, clearh@glasnet.ru
10. Mr. Tynybek Baitov – Grant Manager, Almaty, Kazakhstan, (3272) 92 71 88, tynybek@isar.almaty.kz
11. Mr. Mikhail Taimarov – Systems Administrator, Almaty, Kazakhstan, (3272) 92 71 88, miky@isar.almaty.kz
12. Ms. Gulnara Jalmaganbetova – Grant Manager, Almaty, Kazakhstan, (3272) 92 71 88, gulnara@isar.almaty.kz
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**LIST OF SELECTED NATIONAL LEGISLATION
RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION,
CIVIL SOCIETY, INFORMATION & NGOs**

Republic of Kazakhstan

1. **Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan**, August 30, 1995
2. The Law **"On Environmental Protection"**, July 16, 1997
3. The Law **"On Social Associations"**, May 31, 1996
4. The Law **"On Land"**, January 24, 2001
5. The Law **"On Specially Protected Nature Territories"**, July 15, 1997
6. The Law **"On Ecological Expertise"**, March 18, 1997
7. **Civil Code**, July 1, 1999
8. **Code on Civil Procedures**, July 13, 1999
9. The Law **"On Non-commercial (non-profit) Organizations"**, January 16, 2001
10. **National Environmental Action Plan for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan** – Almaty, 1999

Republic of Uzbekistan

1. **Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan**, December 8, 1992
2. The Law **"On Environmental Protection"**, December 9, 1992
3. The Law **"On Ecological Expertise"**, May 25, 2000
4. The Law **"On Forestry"**, April 15, 1999
5. The Law **"On Non-governmental, Non-profit Organizations"**, April 14, 1999
6. **"Land Code"** April 30, 1998
7. The Law **"On Specially Protected Natural Territories"**, May 7, 1993
8. The Law **"On Water and Water Use"**, May 6, 1993
9. The Law **"On Subterranean Resources"**, September 24, 1994
10. The Law **"On Atmospheric Air"**, December 27, 1996
11. **The Criminal Code**, September 22, 1994, No 2014-XII
12. **The Administrative Responsibility Code**, September 22, 1994, No 2015-XII
13. **The Forestry Code**
14. The Law **"On Dekhkan Community"**, July 3, 1992
15. The Law **"On the State Sanitary Supervision"**, July 3, 1992
16. The Law **"On the State Local Power"**, 1993
17. The Law **"On Bodies of Citizens' Self-Management"**, April 14, 1999 [September 2, 1993]
18. The Law **"On Protection and Use of Flora"**, December 26, 1997
19. The Law **"On Freedom of Conscious and Religious Organizations"**, May 1, 1998
20. The Law **"On the Concept of National Security"** No 461-1, August 29, 1997
21. The Law **"On Protection of Professional Activity of a Journalist"**, April 24, 1997
22. The Law **"On Political Parties"**, December 26, 1996
23. The Law **"On National Discussion of Draft Laws"**, December 14, 2000
24. The Law **"On Protection of Consumers' Rights"**, April 26, 1996
25. The Law **"On Protection of Citizens' Health"**, August 29, 1996
26. The Law **"On Public Associations in the Republic of Uzbekistan"**, September 15, 1991
27. The Law **"On Guarantees and Free Access to Information"**, April 24, 1997
28. The Law **"On Oliy Majlis Representative for Human Rights (Ombudsman)"**, April 24, 1997
29. The Law **"On Citizens' Inquiries"**, May 6, 1994

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30. The Law “**On Labor Protection**”, No 839-XII, May 6, 1993
31. The Law “**On Protection of the State Secrets**”, No 848-XII, May 7, 1993
32. The Law “**On the Concept of National Security**” No 467-1, August 29, 1997
33. **The Civil Code**, September 29, 1996
34. **The Criminal Code**, September 22, 1994
35. **The Code On Administrative Liability**, September 22, 1996
36. **The Labor Code**, December 21, 1995
37. Cabinet Resolution “**On the Statute of the National Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Sustainable Development**”, November 12, 1997
38. The Government Resolution No 246, May 24, 1993 “**Statute of the Funds for Environmental Protection**”
39. National Report “**On the State of the Environment and Use of Natural Resources in the Republic of Uzbekistan**”, Tashkent, 1996, 1997
40. **National Environmental Action Plan**, draft Report, 1998
41. **National Environmental Health Action Plan** (National Action Plan on the Hygiene of the Environment), (second edition, December 1996) 1998.

Republic of Turkmenistan

1. **Constitution of the Republic of Turkmenistan**, May 18, 1992
2. The Law “**On Environmental Protection**”, November 12, 1991
3. The Law “**On Specially Protected Nature Territories**”, May 19, 1992
4. The Law “**On Subterranean Resources**”, December 14, 1992
5. The Law “**On Social Associations**”, September 23, 1994
6. **The Sanitary Code**, May 19, 1992
7. The Law “**On Investment Activity in Turkmenistan**”, May 19, 1992
8. The Law “**On Foreign Investments in Turkmenistan**”, May 19, 1992
9. **The Forestry Code**, April 12, 1993
10. The Law “**On Foreign Concessions**”, October 1, 1993
11. The Law “**On Property**”, October 1, 1993
12. The Law “**On Protection and Rational Use of Flora**”, December 28, 1993
13. The Law “**On State Ecological Expertise**”, June 15, 1995
14. The Law “**On Protection of State Secrets**”, November 24, 1995